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"THE MAN TRAIL"

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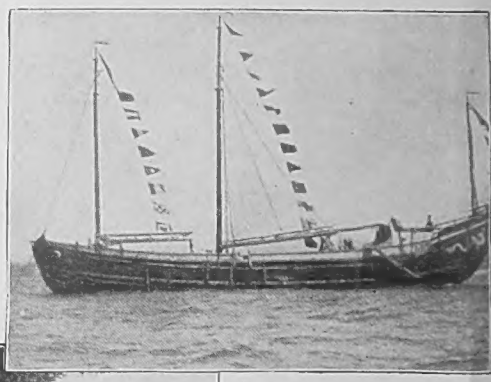
A day's bag near Jholpore, Central Provinces, India—a black buck and a fine young tiger. "The important-looking background is only the local Zemindar and his satellites, who are always just as eager to be in the picture as any New York crowd." Interesting types, nevertheless. When such a crowd gathers it behooves the sportsman to keep a sharp eye on his kill; for some stealthy scoundrel will surely sneak an opportunity to try and cut off the tiger's whiskers, as a charm against *bhooths*—devils who live in trees and lonely places and drop down on the passer-by's neck.

A peaceful Philippine scene above. But the washing hung on the line was a signal to natives carefully entrenched on the hilltops that a detachment of H of the 38th was coming. The ambuscade was sprung at the exact moment when the Americans arrived between the washing and the hut, but the Americans charged and drove the Filipinos from their trenches. Photo from R. B. MacRorie, a contributor, who was, of course, present during the festivities.



A Chinese pirate jun
160 years old which las
year made the trip fro
China to San Diego with
out help — 159 days
Among the curios on boar
was a beheading-knife wit
which its own crew ha
been executed when cap
tured. After its piratica
career it was used as
prison-ship, then in th
opium trade, and is now
floating museum and a fin
"property" for making
"movie" films. Photo from
C. L. Edholm

To the left is a photo
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will be within your reach April 3d, and here are some of the things that will happen to you:

First you'll be in for a fight with a big automobile company that scoffs at your ideas for a valveless motor but tries to steal the plans from you. You're young, but you fight it out against all kinds of odds, build a car of your own, practically out of scraps, and if ever a race was fought to the last ounce in a man's body it is the national event in which you fight for everything life can hold for you. ("The Boss' Daughter," complete novelette, by William West, author of "The Range Rider.")

Your next excitement lies in the prize-ring. You've read lots of magazine prize-fight tales, but nothing like what happens to you in W. Townend's "Charlie Brown of Lambeth" (complete novelette).

Then you swing into a cowboy's saddle and your name is *Sandy Bourke*. You don't spend all your time shooting up towns, for you're a real cowboy and a real human, but you are in for a lot of adventures of which only the first is set forth in J. Allan Dunn's "The Reward."

For a change you try your hand in the jungle of India and make an American film company and some British officials sit up and take notice. Here again you're in for a series of adventures, Gordon McCreagh leading you to it ("The Man from Home").

Then you change your name to *Mud—Jack Mud*, alias *John Peabody*, and all of us know the job you've cut out for yourself up in your uncle's lumber-camp in the North Woods. Here's luck to you against *Bull Bart*. You'll need it. (Henry Oyen's "The Man Trail," Part II).

Then Talbot Mundy makes you a Western sheriff and takes you to England. After that you cut loose and adventure it all over the world—with *Sark* and *Bassett* in Alaska; with *Sir John Hawkwood* in Italy; in the Middle West, the Philippines, West Africa, a city fire, the South, the sea, the English army in India, our Western frontier of the old days—you surely get your fill of adventure and good times and all of us want to go along with you in the May *Adventure*.

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April 1915 Vol. IX No. VI

The Island of the Dead

By J. Allan Dunn

CHAPTER I

LEVUKA LOUIS'

"THE prettiest girl I've seen since I was on the coast," declared Captain Adams of the schooner *Lady Mine.* "She made me homesick. We passed her this afternoon early in a canoe with four paddlers doing their hardest. They was inside the reef or I'd have asked her if I could give her a lift. White she was, and plumb worried, driving on her paddlemen. Course we couldn't get nigh her account of the reef, but I got a good look at her through the glasses.

"I sent her a hail, but she didn't notice it, just kept on wigging to Kanakas. Never saw her before, but there's something stirring or my brain needs calking. Not many white girls this side of Suva. Mystery to me. Twice over. Who she is and what she was after."

There was a crowd at Levuka Louis', on Viti Levu in the Fijis. The "Snuggery" of the little Frenchman—trader, storekeeper, dabbler in a hundred enterprises—was filled with the captains, mates and supercargoes of the little fleet of trading-vessels that, the season being practically over, rode to their moorings in the tiny harbor. Louis knew every white man and all the natives of importance in Eastern Melanesia, and his place was the clearing-house of the gossip of the Southwestern Pacific.

It had been man-talk all evening. The price of trade—so many yards of cloth, sticks of tobacco, tins of salmon or bottles of squareface, for so much copra, hawk-bill turtle or *bêche-de-mer;* so much paid for pearl-concessions, so much for plantation-land or trading-stations. It was the "gamming" of men engaged in a common traffic, meeting after the interval of a year.

Saxons and Celts they were, with hardly an exception. Americans, British, Germans, Scandinavians; rovers all, with the glamor of the South Seas in their cosmos, loving their life in the belt that lies between Capricorn and Cancer as much for the adventure it held as for the profits.

As the evening wore on, the games of pinochle and coon-can broke up and the players joined the main group, listening to the tales of risks about the reef-haunted, current-swept atolls and islands.

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"The bottom's out of everything," growled Captain Adams of the *Lady Mine*, a hard-bitten Yankee skipper of the old school. "The Kanakas want a fathom of dress-goods where they used to be glad of a yard. A master-trader ain't got no more show these days than a broken-legged jack-rabbit in a dog-house.

"Maybe you don't go far enough afield, Captain," said Dick Boone, youngest of all the skippers present but not the least successful. "There's plenty of lagoons off the beaten track that hold good shell and haven't been scratched yet. That's the way dad made his pile, and it's the way I hope to make mine."

"When you're as old as I am, son," rejoined Adams, "you'll stick to known cruising grounds. Your dad was lucky. 'Boone's Luck!' Mebbe it'll hold for you. Ef it don't, you'll be changin' the name of your schooner from the *Roamer* to the *Homer*, an' playin' safe. Wait till you've been scarred up with *ngari-ngari* an' get the chills an' fever reg'lar every three weeks."

Boone laughed. Young as he was, just over his quarter-century mark, he was not without experience as chief officer for his father in the *Roamer*, now his own command. Over six feet, lean, dark naturally, and tanned by sun and wind almost to the color of a native, the languor of the tropics passed him by unscathed. Deep of chest, quick and supple as a cat, he was the equal of any man in the room for strength and endurance. The heritage of ancestors from America's early frontier days was an asset within him for courage, quick thinking and dexterity.

"I'm going to make my pile and quit before that happens," he said. "Dad's back there in the Berkeley Hills, across the bay from San Francisco, taking life easy and trying to grow roses; and I'm going to follow his example by a short cut, if I can."

"Thet sounds fine, son, but I'll bet thet every time your dad sees a ship goin' out the Gate, topsails ready to break out, nosin' through to blue water behind the tug, he wishes he was aft in command, south'ard bound. Wait till you get the tropics workin' in your blood after a few years more of it. Ain't thet right, Louis?"

"*Vraiment*," assented Louis, cool and dapper in linen trousers and silk shirt. "*Moi*, v'en I come here, I mean soon to return to *La Belle France*, to the Valley of Loire. Now—" he shrugged his voluble shoulders—"I know I should not sleep not to hear the sound of the reef, the vind in the palms, the perfume of the flowers."

"An' the gen'ral excitement, eh Louis?"

There was a universal laugh. The ventures of Louis, often hidden, were known or guessed at by most of them. Some had shared in the profits that usually accrued. Established in British territory, doing business with Germans, his national enemies, Louis himself was, on the surface, placidly international. All present were his friends. His enemies generally gave him a wide berth.

"Ye're richt, Adams, aboot the condeetion o' affairs," said Menzies of the schooner *Cutty Sark*. "The corporations ha' cornered the pick o' the trade. And something's happened to the turtle. The beasties ha' clean left the seas. I believe it's the wireless they've got snappin' an' crackin' everywhere wi' their high-powered stations, fillin' the void wi' voltage an' *amperes* an' the like, roamin' wild. I'm readin' that not a millionth part o' the eelectreecity they discharge is used i' the message, but goes careerin' here an' yon, like the wind. 'Tis dangerous, mind ye, an' no canny."

"They tell me," said Adams, "that the Von der Mehden Company has put wireless at all their stations an' installed it in their ships. It's a cold day when ye'll find me clutterin' up my top-hamper with a mess of wires. An' their supercargoes," he went on indignantly. "By thunder, they *ain't* supercargoes. They're a half-breed between drummers an' counter-jumpers. Carryin' sample strips of muslin an' percale in leather cases, showin' fashion-plates an' takin' measures. Skippers turned engineers an' wearin' overalls over messy little putterin' engines. Shucks!"

THERE was no laugh this time, and the skipper glowered about him for the cause.

"You hav' not met Mr. Von der Mehden?" asked Louis. "I shall introduce heem."

A young man who had been sitting, quietly listening, came forward with extended hand.

"I am glad to meet you, Captain," he said with but the slightest trace of accent. "I haf often heard of you. I am Otto Von der Mehden, und I haf come from Hamburg to make the round of our stations and learn

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something of the trade at first hand. A vacation trip, with business on the side."

Captain Adams growled a somewhat embarrassed greeting, but shook hands cordially. The representative of the big trading-corporation was round-faced, flaxen-haired, inclined to general chubbiness. Blue eyes twinkled behind glasses, the scar of a college duel puckered his left cheek.

"The wireless has it's uses, Captain," he said. "It was wireless that brought help to one of our schooners wrecked on the Guadalancar Coast, was it not?"

"You're right there," said Boone. "I was at Port Adams when they got the call. I went with the *Berthe*. The canoes were 'round the schooner thick as mosquitoes. They couldn't have held them off much longer. And power's a mighty good thing, too, in a calm or making a lagoon at nightfall on the ebb."

There was a murmur of assent from the crowd.

"We may use big gasoline launches altogether by and by, Captain," said the young German. "You saw the new double-ender in the harbor, Captain Adams. I brought her down with me on the *Louise*. Makes fourteen knots. We're going to try her out in the Fiji trade. Modern methods, Captain. Save time, cover distance, increase profits."

Adams grunted.

"If you will, I should like to drink everybody's health now."

There was a general shifting of chairs and loin-clad native boys busied themselves with the orders. Another suddenly projected himself through the open door.

"*Akami* comealong harbor," he said excitedly.

"The *Acmel*" said Boone. "Captain Thurlowe. I thought I heard a chain go a little while ago."

"Coming in after dark?" queried Von der Mehden.

"He can smell his way into any lagoon in Melanesia," said Boone. "Besides, there are the range lights. Here he is."

A BIG man blocked out the stars that shone through the door with his massive shoulders. A breath of colder climes seemed to creep in with him through the tropic night. Bearded like a Viking, his pale blue eyes shone with the true deep-sea gleam that comes from long gazing at wide horizons. Once a whaler, he had followed the game when profits took it northward, but he had given up the chilly Arctic for his first love and was now a free-trader of the Southern archipelagoes, bound by the spell of the tropics, forsaking Polaris for the Southern Cross.

Nodding greetings to the crowd and introduced to Von der Mehden, he drained his glass with a good-will "Luck!"

"What's the news from the Tongas, Thurlowe?" asked Boone.

Thurlowe's face grew grave.

"There's news of Huddy," he said.

Exclamations broke from his listeners.

"I put into Viletu for repairs," said Thurlowe. "We ran into some driftage, broke the martingale and whisker-booms and messed up the stays. Hung up on the outer reef was what was left of Huddy's schooner, the *Number Four*. She'd been set fire to and burned close to the water-line aft. For'ard the seas had saved her and the figurehead, Kalua over at Tahiti carved for Huddy, was untouched."

"Natives?" asked Boone. "But they don't burn unless by accident."

"No. She'd been drifting a long while. Weed and shells over the scorched timbers showed, where she'd been driven high on the reef. I reckon you can put it down to the account of Sleeth."

"Sleeth?" asked Boone amid the general excitement. "Is he alive? Dad believes it, but no one seems to know for certain."

"Plenty of evidence, to my mind," said Thurlowe. "Figure up the missing men and ships. Backus of the *Ada*, Wahlgren of the *Lehua*, Gregg of the *Uau*, Barkhausen of the *Tropic Bird*, Jim Renton of the *Petrel*, Kennedy of the *Comber*—half a dozen more. All master-owners! None of 'em the kind of men to pile up on a reef and get wiped out by the natives. Good seamen too. They didn't all go down in a monsoon! And, what's to the point to my mind, every man jack of 'em cleanin' up big in pearls. Don't forget that. It's Sandalwood Sleeth, His Mark, take it from me."

"Who's Sandalwood Sleeth?" asked Von der Mehden.

Thurlowe looked at him as he stroked his beard.

"It's a bit of a yarn," he said, "but it needs airing, I think. Some of you men knew Sleeth. Your father did—" he turned to Boone—"all of you have heard of him.

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Sleeth harks back to the old blackbirding days. He and Slugger Reid, and Red Branscombe, combed the groups and supplied labor to the Hawaiian plantations. They were a tough crowd, Sleeth the worst of 'em, I guess. It's a wonder they weren't baked for long pig in the ovens long ago.

"But Reid's a pillar of the Central Union Church in Honolulu now. Red Branscombe ran afoul of French Frigate Shoals one night and made Honolulu in an open boat after eighteen days, and disappeared. They say he tried to blackmail Reid an' that Reid and his old Chinese cook, who was one of the original crowd, got rid of him. Some say they murdered Red and buried him in Reid's garden. That's another man's yarn.

"But Sleeth—he got his nickname from plundering sandalwood schooners—started out as a plain pirate after the blackbirding game broke up. He's been chased by cruisers, reported murdered, hanged and drowned a dozen times, but the rumor always came back from some out-of-the-way group that he was alive and robbing wholesale. He collected a tough gang of men who stay away from known ports for good reasons, ex-convicts, crooks, deserters, and cruised the lower seas in his schooner—the *Ghost* he calls her, I suppose he's rebuilt her more'n once by this time—like an eagle after fish-hawks.

"He'd pick the small fry, Chinese, Japs and natives who were getting out sandalwood, wait till they were loaded and swoop down on them with his gang, armed from toes to eyebrows. All kinds of complaints, but the chaps he robbed didn't count for much, and they never cornered Sleeth and that slippery schooner of his. She could sail like a witch and the islands weren't patrolled much those days.

"Sleeth grew bolder as he grew older—he must be close to seventy—a whale of a man, built out of teak an' whalebone at that, an' he kept gatherin' in the bad eggs. Presently the schooners began to drop out of sight. Backus of the *Ada*, who'd found a regular pearl-mine somewhere an' was bringin' in black pearls worth thousands, was the first. Sam Cree, a Portygee who murdered his captain an' put the hands who wouldn't join him in a leaky whaleboat, was supposed to have gone down to join Sleeth somewhere near the Kermadecs, an' more skippers failed to make port. All of 'em successful pearlers, mind you.

"Captain Boone, Dick's father, tried to organize to round him up, but we couldn't get any definite clue, and it was hard to get together. None of the gang dares to come back to civilization, an' they've got a big hang-out somewhere, women with them, natives an' white women too. A bad lot. Some say Sleeth's headquarters are over New Caledonia way. It's known he had a hide-out on Matemotu, but no one has the exact position of that."

"MATEMOTU?" said Boone. "The Island of the Dead! That was a holding of King Te Rakau's, wasn't it?"

"Yes. It's a barren crater. High cliffs out of deep water. No reef. Te Rakau used to send all his prisoners there—those he didn't eat. Took the group from his brother and stowed him on Matemotu. Had to haul them up on a rope and left 'em there to live off eggs an' sea-birds. There's a brackish spring too. Sleeth and Te Rakau were in cahoots till the chief died. It's somewhere northeast of the Kermadecs, sheer out of everywhere. The Directory don't give it. Wherever his main hang-out is, I believe Sleeth and his gang of cutthroats to be alive and responsible for those missing ships. What do you think, Louis?"

Louis, the living encyclopedia of the Southwestern Pacific, nodded.

"Some say he is myth," he answered. "*Mais ma foi*, I have a doubt."

"He don't interfere with the big traders, you see," said Thurlowe to Von der Mehden. "Just the men who own their own ships and go scouting for new pearl-patches. Your father had a run-in with him once, Boone."

"A run-out, rather. Dad was coming from Noumea, full of shell, with some good pearls. Sleeth, if all's true, has spies everywhere, natives and beach-trash whites, and gets news of any likely hauls. The *Ghost*, she's painted gray and her canvas dulled, came up in the night. Got within half a mile of them before they sighted her. She was faster than the *Roamer* closehauled, and dad ran wing and wing down wind. Sleeth trailed him to Riviki shoals, where dad, who used to go there for turtle, cross-cut. Sleeth didn't know the channels and they got clear."

"Then," said Von der Mehden, "the man is no myth."

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"That was twenty years ago," said Boone. "Huddy has been missing three years. Sleeth's been quiet lately."

"There is Newell," said Louis. "He's missing."

"Ned Newell, of the *Pleiades?*" exclaimed Boone. "He's Dad's best friend. One of mine too, for that, and most of us. You were partners with him, Thurlowe?"

The giant nodded.

"How missing?" he asked.

"Sailed from Sydney in April," said Louis. "Vent to his pearl-patch that he always keep so quiet, somewhere Norfolk vay. He vas to meet his daughter at Apia early last month. *Sacre!* There is no word! She is in Suva looking for heem, or vas last week. He is not likely to be forty day overdue. Maybe it is monsoon? Maybe reef, maybe Kanakas? Maybe Sleeth! Vat is eet, Tomi?"

He went out to the *lanai* in response to the signal of a native and quickly returned, beckoning Boone to join him.

"What is it, Louis?"

"Lady to see you, Deeck."

"White Mary stopalong Queen Hoteli," said the native, "she speakalong she want see Kapitani Booni."

"I theenk it is M'mselle Newell, Deeck," said Louis. "I heard she was to come to Levuka."

"It's ten o'clock," said Boone. "She want see me right away?" he asked the Fijian.

"She speak she like talkalong you plenty quick. She in plenty a damhurri. She give me *kala*." He grinningly displayed a dollar.

"Better go, Deeck," said Louis. "She is *belle*, Miss Newell. *Belle comme—la lune!*" He pointed to the garden where the great tropic moon was rising behind the breadfruits like a silver shield. "Go out thees vay, eef you like."

Dick hastened through the garden, fragrant with frangipanni and gardenia, crossed its bordering coco palms and strode down the coral-dust road, wondering at this sudden *rendezvous* with a girl he had never seen, of whom he knew nothing, save that she was the daughter of his father's good friend and his own acquaintance, Captain Ned Newell of the schooner *Pleiades*, forty days overdue, held somewhere in the sea-wastes under the hint of menace, in the person of Sandalwood Sleeth, latter-day pirate.

CHAPTER II

SANDALWOOD SLEETH, HIS MARK

THERE is nothing pretentious about the Queen Hotel at Levuka, but the low building of coral blocks, set in a garden of tropical luxuriance, is cool and not without its comforts. The hostess, the much-relieved relict of a drunken trader, met Boone as he entered.

"The young lydy's hanxious to see you, Captun," she said. "She just got hin from Suva. Hif you'll go hon the *lanai* she'll be with you has soon has she chynges 'er dress."

"All right, Mrs. Johnstone. Thank you."

The broad veranda gave on to the garden, raised from it by half a dozen low steps. The grass thatch of the roof shut off the crests of the dense verdure, through tiny crevices of which the rising moon sent silver tentacles. The garden lay in a purple half-light beneath the stars, and the faint land-wind blended the odors of the blossoms into a mysterious incense of the night, the breath of the spirit of the tropics.

He heard a light footstep and turned, tossing his cigarette to the grass beneath. A slight figure, gowned in white that showed gray in the shadow of the *lanai*, came quickly toward him with both hands outstretched.

"Oh, Captain Boone!" cried the girl in a voice that slightly faltered, "I'm so glad to find you. I came by canoe from Suva when I heard you were in."

"Miss Newell?"

The girl stopped, drawing back her hands.

"Who are you?" she asked, looking intently at him through the dusk.

In the shadow Boone looked down into two eyes steadily meeting his own. They were wide apart and very widely open. There was a crown of hair of pale gold, with little gleams here and there where the straying moonbeams caught the strands, darker brows curving finely; a straight, short nose, a mouth firmly set but adorable, with a tiny pendule drooping from the bow of the upper lip; and a chin, upraised, cleft with a dimple that held a little pool of shadow.

Beyond that he was barely conscious of a figure, straight and slim, of a vague fragrance foreign to the perfume of the garden, and, within, a little shock, a vibration like the tinkling of a bell ringing deep within

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his consciousness, as if in answer to some message.

"I am Captain Boone," he said. "I think you expected to see my father. He is in California, retired."

"Oh!" she said drawing back a little.

Boone sensed the note of disappointment in her voice.

"I am trying to fill his shoes," he said. "If it is anything to do with your father, Miss Newell, you can trust me to do my best to aid you."

He held out his hand. Her eyes searched his face as her cool palm slid automatically into his.

"Thank you," she said. "I am sure I can."

The moon broke through a tangle of the boughs and threw its calcium on the pair. Boone checked his first appraisal of the girl. He could tell the color of her eyes now. They were gray, clear and dark, and as their glances mingled he felt the little thrill deep within him once again.

"I have heard he is overdue," said Boone. "Let us sit down."

He drew up two lounging-chairs.

"Captain Boone," said the girl earnestly, "my father and yours were close friends. You knew him perhaps?"

"Quite well."

"I sent for your father, as I thought, late as it is, because the matter is urgent—terribly urgent! I need assistance badly. My father is in danger—" her voice shook, and she steadied it in a lower key—"and if you can help me I shall be glad."

"My time is at your service, Miss Newell. I am my own master."

"You have heard of a man called Sleeth?" she asked.

Boone nodded. There was a sudden, swift rustle in the crotons by the steps. The girl leaned forward tensely, grasping the arm of Boone's chair, the moon full on her eager face.

"There's some one there!" she whispered.

Boone sprang to the rail and vaulted over, crashing through the brittle leaves. The girl leaned down above him.

"I thought I saw a shadow crossing the lawn by the palms," she said. "It disappeared in the hybiscus. They've gone now, whoever they were. Can't we go where we can't be overheard? Not inside, the walls are too thin. I have felt for days as if I was being followed, even in the canoe coming from Suva."

"The open beach is the best place," said Boone. "Will you come?"

"Surely. Wait just a moment, please."

She left him, to return swiftly and press something hard and cold into his palm.

"It's an automatic pistol," she said. "You can probably use it better than I can."

THEY rapidly passed down the straggling street in silence and came out upon the crescent beach beyond the harbor. The moon flooded it with light beyond the slow-moving shadows of the coco palms, massed along the curve of the land. The land-breeze pressed the soft folds of her gown against her rounded limbs as she walked springily by his side. They kept close to the edge of the lagoon, its waves, their force broken by the reef, sending a lace of phosphorescent foam to their feet.

"About Sleeth," said Boone at last. "I know all that is current concerning him. In fact we were talking about him tonight. What makes you think that he has anything to do with your father's delay?"

"Captain Boone," she answered, "I was my father's chum. His little pal, he called me." Her voice choked for a second. "I think he wishes that I had been a boy, though he has never said so. I have wished so too, sometimes, but never more than now. After my mother died—I was sixteen then—I left school, and we have been together since then every moment that was possible. I have sailed with him several times, twice on the full trip.

"Last year, on the voyage back, Breggs, our first-mate, broke his arm ashore at Noumea. They said he had been on a drunken spree, but he had never done such a thing before in the fifteen years he had been with my father, and I believe now there was foul-play somewhere. We had no efficient second, and father gladly took a man who offered himself.

"He was Spanish or Portuguese, a good navigator, but to me horrible. He was a big, burly fellow. One side of his face was handsome, in a coarse way. On the other he had been scarred by a cut that had nearly lost him his eyesight, and the wound, in healing, had distorted his eye into a malignant squint. On that side, too, beneath his long mustache, was the scar of a hare-lip. The hair did not cover the seam, and sometimes when the wind was blowing it

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would expose this hidden, sneering grin. Those were accidents of course, but the two sides of his face seemed to typify the man —a rough show of good-nature and then the leer of a devil."

"Sam Cree! Sleeth's right-hand man!" cried Boone.

"So we found out, from description, after we reached Wellington. He disappeared the night before we got in, during his watch. I used to take a pride in keeping father's log. I had given it to him. It was bound in stiff leather with a brass lock that had taken my fancy. Several times Cree asked to look in it, for comparison, but father did not care for any one who was a stranger to read it and get the bearings of his island where our pearls have come from.

"Then father caught him forward, chatting with the men, and spoke to him sharply about it. The same night he disappeared I found him tampering with the lock. He made some excuse, but the brass was all scratched. Then he went overboard. None of the sailors saw him jump. We think a canoe must have come alongside for him on some signal, as we were sailing not far from the coast.

"Father was going to make only two more trips, this and one more. The two lagoons were nearly worked out, though the patches that were left were proving the richest of all in pearls. He would not take me, though I begged, because—I am sure of it now, though he made light of it—he was afraid of the risks. He was to meet me at Apia about the first of last month and we were going up to San Francisco and take a long trip together. And now—" she caught her lower lip between her teeth and Boone saw the film of tears in her eyes—"I am trying to be brave about it, but I am only a girl."

"Brave!" said Boone. "You're wonderful. Look here, Miss Newell, I'm with you in this. It's just the same as if it were my dad. We'll find him all right."

He spoke in comforting fashion, but the thought of the burned hulk of Huddy's schooner stranded on the lonely reef came to him, and he remembered the long list of missing men.

THEY had come to the horn of the bight and stood clear of the shadow of the rocky promontory, where the straggling pandanus grew thickly.

"I waited at Apia till the fifteenth without feeling worried very much," said the girl. "Then, one night—I slept with the windows open—I awoke suddenly. It was dark, but I felt sure some one was in the room. I pressed a little electric-torch I keep under my pillow and flashed it through the mosquito netting. I saw no one, but on the floor was this."

She took a little package from the bosom of her gown, unfolded it, and gave it to Boone. The full moon furnished ample light to read it. The girl stood by as he perused it, her eyes searching the shore and the promontory above them. The letter was written on fine, stout paper fiber, with dense black ink in an uneducated, scrawling hand.

MISS MARION NEWELL:

Not later than August twenty place in waterproof contaner fixed to buoy the exakt latitood and longitood of your father's pearl island. Anker on Reva Shole twenty mile east of Vaenga south of Viti Levu. Then yore father will get back to port. Otherways he will last as long as his grubb. Don't let ennyone kno yore bizness or he wont come back. We wont pick up the buoy unlest all is clear. Keep a quite tung in yore hed or yore father wont use his agane. SANDALWOOD SLEETH.
[HIS MARK]

Below the signature was a crude sketch of a skull with a bone held between the teeth. Boone turned the paper over at the girl's gesture. On the other side were a few words in a bold handwriting.

DEAR MARION:

Don't tell. I am safe. Don't tell and don't worry. I——

The last few words were smeared so as to be indistinguishable. The ink had sunk into the layers of the fiber, and it was impossible to guess at the meaning. It was signed Edward M. Newell.

"That is father's handwriting," she said. "He says not to tell. I don't know what to do. If we could make out the last of the——"

She clutched at his arm, pointing upward.

In the deep shadows of the *pandanus* Boone thought he could make out a movement. Something flashed brilliantly in a sudden spark, and he fancied he could distinguish a hand grasping a bough. Whipping the pistol from his pocket he fired as swiftly as he could press, twice at the hand, six times slightly to the right. There was the sound of a slight scuffle, lost in the cries of alarmed birds that went whirring seaward.

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"I fired at the sparkle," he said. "Stone in a ring, I fancy. And I shifted to the right. Think I may have got him. We'd better get back. We've got to get things in action."

They ran side by side for a while across the strand, the girl keeping easy pace with the man in a free, boyish stride. Then they slowed to a swift walk.

"There is plenty of money," she said a trifle breathlessly. "We are quite rich, you know, from the pearls. And I have my own share and account. I brought some with me and I got more by cable at Apia. If that isn't enough——"

"That'll be all right," said Boone. "I've got some, and I can raise all I want. We've got to start things quickly. You'll have to set the buoy, I think. Better let me do it. I'll try and track them. I've got some idea of where your father may be."

"Where?"

"On Matemotu."

"Where's that? Can't we go to him right away?"

"Well that's to find out. Matemotu is not on the map. But we'll do it. Maybe I can get some idea of the latitude and we can run that down. The surest way will be to trail Sleeth or whoever he sends after the buoy. If we can get the location of his hang-out, we'll clear out the whole gang. Thurlowe'll join in. It's the end of the season. Maybe some of the others. We'll see. But the only real clue we have at present is the buoy."

"Do you mean to give them the position?"

"No. We'll play for time. If we gave them a false one they'd likely go there first, and, though I don't imagine your father is in immediate danger of starvation, especially if he's on Matemotu, we'll waste no time in getting him.

"Write a note saying that you do not remember the exact position, but have cabled home to get it. That will give us a few days leeway. Any longer would make them suspicious. This way they'll either go straight to where your father is to try and get it out of him again, though I imagine that's a useless job, or sail direct for their headquarters. If I trail them, we'll organize and soon get you in touch with your father."

"But they say they won't come for the buoy unless the coast is clear."

"We can get around that. I'll have to get a launch, mask it somehow, and hang off and on after I've set the buoy."

"Can I go with you?"

"Better not, Miss Marion. It won't do for both of us to take all the chances. There'll be a risk. You stay with Mrs Johnstone. You'll come with us on the real trip to Matemotu or wherever we go, of course. I'll take a room at the Queen tonight, next to yours, and I'll send a message to Thurlowe. He can sleep on the other side. Then you'll feel safe. Thurlowe was a partner of your father's, you know."

"I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't. It's all going to come out all right."

THEY passed quickly to the Queen without incident, Boone keeping the automatic handy. He saw the girl to her room on her promise to try and sleep, returning her the pistol.

After arranging for his own quarters he wrote a note to Thurlowe while the widow's son waited to take it.

"I'll have to get a launch," he thought. "By George, there's the Dutchman's! We'll have to let him in on it. I'll wager he's game. I like his looks, scar and all."

Fifteen minutes later Thurlowe and Von der Mehden were closeted with Boone, talking in eager whispers.

"*Ach himmel!*" said the German, his glasses off, his eyes sparkling. "Sure can you haf de launch. This is what you call a spree. I go with you."

"Some one's got to stand by Miss Newell," said Boone. "That chap's skulking about somewhere. He may be just a spy or he may be up to something more desperate, especially now he knows she has told me everything."

"Wore a ring, did he?" asked Thurlowe. "I don't know who it could be. Several of them left the room soon after you did. Most of them I knew, though."

"He's nursing a bullet, I think—or two, I hope," said Boone.

"Hope so. How'll you mask the launch?" asked Thurlowe.

"Fell a palm or two and lash them alongside. Then lay off with a good pair of glasses. They said the twentieth in the note. Today's the eighteenth. If all's clear, they may come in earlier. If they put off in a canoe, I can catch them before they reach land. If it's the *Ghost*, I'll make shift

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to keep them in sight somehow. I wish we could get the position of Matemotu. Then you could go straight there."

"Goin' to be hard to get that," said Thurlowe. "Any native would be scared of Sleeth if they had the dope. And some white men. If any one knows it, it would be Louis, but I doubt if he would tell either. While you are gone, Boone, I'll try my best to find out and I'll have a talk with Adams and one or two of the rest we can trust. We'll have to go strong and armed to tackle that outfit."

"Why not get the British Government?" asked Von der Mehden. "After we haf found where to go. Of course now Sleeth would be watching to see if we got in touch with them."

"British Government ——!" said Thurlowe. "They're sure, I grant you that, but they're all-fired slow. Sleeth'd get wind of it some way while they were getting a requisition through for coal. We'll tackle this ourselves."

"*Ach himmel*, I haf it!" exclaimed the German. "Listen. Captain Thurlowe, he watches Miss Newell. I shall go to our station here. I shall install a receiving apparatus in the launch and keep in touch with you. You can't send though, but it will do some good. We may get in touch with that chap you fired at. Some communications are better than none."

"How about the mast for the aerials?" asked Boone. "I can't hide that very well. I might scrape it dull, but it would stick out of the sea like a sore thumb."

"It is not necessary. I haf a degree of engineer, at Heidelberg. It is easy. A few wires grounded on iron and a good receiving-helmet, and you can get anything within five hundred miles. It is simble."

He glowed with the ardor of a boy over his first chemistry experiment, his dialect thickening with his excitement.

"All right," said Boone. "How about an engineer? I'll take my mate, Joe Stevens, but neither of us can handle that engine expertly."

"I'll lend you one," said Von der Mehden. "*Gott!* Der beer iss warm. Let's haf some fresh."

"Better be turning in," said Boone. "Miss Newell will feel safer when she hears some one either side of her. About Reva Shoals? I suppose I can get hold of a native pilot from Louis?"

"I wouldn't trust Louis with too much of your business, Boone," said Thurlowe. "He's all right, but his affairs spin a big web and he's not goin' to break any of his own threads if he can help it."

"I'll be careful. Early tomorrow then. Goodnight."

CHAPTER III

THE GRAY SCHOONER

WITH the crest of Viti Levu's central peak in a dim cloud on the horizon behind them, the launch cut its way cleanly through the glassy, deep-blue, almost purple sea. Vaenga, a lonely, low-lying islet, lay forty miles to the south and east, with Reva Shoals about thirty miles straight ahead.

The afternoon was breathless. The wrinkled waves seemed molded in blue glaze, as if the launch supplied all the motion, rising and falling on a rigid sea. Yet the depths were alive. Everywhere the grim chase for existence was on. The harassed flying-fish, between their bony-jawed pursuers of the deep and the wide-winged birds that made the waves their feeding-range, skimmed the air frantically on finny planes that dried rapidly in the sunshine. Turtles basked and bat-winged monsters flopped on the surface, the giant rays of those waters.

In the launch Boone sat aft, close to the wires that Von der Mehden had improvised, strung cross-thwarts in the cockpit. The microphonic receiving-helmet was on his head. Two or three messages, unintelligible to his untrained ear, had clicked through the sensitive diaphragm, weighty with national import perhaps, sent over the vibrant bridge established across the Pacific archipelagoes by Great Britain and Germany, part of a magic girdle around the world.

He had made up a hasty code with Von der Mehden, in case of need, though he had consented to the installation rather to please the enthusiastic lender of the launch than from any hope of its practical use. The German engineer, his cylinders purring evenly, registering fourteen knots for every hour of progress, mechanically watched his bearings and oil-cups. Forward, Boone's mate Haley held the course in the little wheel-house. Torua, the Fijian pilot recommended by Louis, asleep in the bows, lay

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asprawl in the hot sun that beat upon his bronze nakedness, one arm across his eyes.

The buoy that was to bear the message for Sleeth lay in the cockpit. Boone had taken an empty gasoline drum, ballasted it, made it conspicuous with red lead and attached to it half-a-dozen fathoms of light cable with a discarded mushroom-anchor for a weight. The note, with its play for delay, was in a baking-powder tin, secured to the drum with marlin and tagged with a label addressed to Sleeth.

It was very still in the waterwaste. The cry of a bird, the splash of a fish, were the only sounds that broke in upon Boone's reverie. Self-reliant by nature and training, the adventure on which he was embarked filled him with quiet satisfaction. Here was the very pith of life. Romance! Though as yet he was barely conscious of that phase. Danger! Which his spirit rose to meet. Mystery! Treasure! What more could a modern knight-errant demand?

Like Orlando, he felt the spirit of his fathers strong within him. They had braved the perils of unknown trails, beset with lurking enemies, had conquered the wilderness, proving their manhood, as he was proving his. They won their spurs by land, he was gaining the epaulets of seahood. That was the only difference.

He had not been without experiences and risks in his eight years of cruising, but this was the first time sex had entered into the adventure. With his level-thinking, clean-living father; from his mother, happy now with a stay-at-home mate in the Berkeley Hills; he had ever thought of womanhood too seriously to care for its lighter daughters, the sensuous, laughter-loving children of the South Seas, and his hours ashore had ever been busy ones, fitting him for the relief of his father's command.

Apart from the mysterious thrill that beset him in the presence of Marion Newell, that haunted him even now, as a spur to prove himself worthy of her quest, he thought of her with admiration blended with pity for her plucky loneliness. She had bid him godspeed that morning with a quiet bravery of chin, steady lips and resolute gray eyes that had affected him as an accolade bestowed upon his errantry. There had been no disturbance through the night, and the watchfulness of Thurlowe's steady, stalwart manhood assured him of her present safety.

It was evident from the persistency of the spy on Viti Levu, from the open daring of the communication with the girl, that the treasure of pearls still left on the island by Captain Newell must be no ordinary one.

He had heard many tales of the marvelous treasure-trove in the lagoons that Captain Newell held the key to, of the size and purity of the gems brought to the market by the owner-master of the *Pleiades;* but all the rumors of Sleeth's cupidity and cruelty had been coupled with the caution that had kept him so long immune from capture and punishment. The hazard of the present attempt seemed to smack more of the ill-judged rapacity of Sam Cree.

It was possible, Boone mused as the launch sped on, leaving a long wake of sparkling foam behind its whirling propeller, that Sleeth was sick or growing too old for mastery. Another thought came that sent the hot blood tingling to his finger-tips. Cree had been on the *Pleiades* with Marion. Her beauty, her dainty femininity, unshadowed by the quaint boyishness she had adopted as her father's chum, that gave her such piquancy, was just the sort to have inflamed the coarse voluptuousness of the renegade Portuguese.

Marion—Boone thought of her as that with the mental intimacy of impending lovers—had said nothing of any attempts at familiarity, but the emphasis with which she had described the man as "horrible" aroused a host of sinister suggestions within the young skipper that made him resolute to pay especial attention to Sam Cree when it came to a time of reckoning. His own heart recoiled, in the shyness of young, clean manhood, at thoughts of personal intimacy with the girl's maiden daintiness, and the idea of Cree's crude desires set the muscles bossing in his lean, well-chiseled jaws. And somewhere in the void, Cupid laughed. The leaven of love works swiftest in absences.

IT WAS two o'clock. By Boone's reckoning Reva Shoals were not far ahead. He stood up, unclamped the helmet and adjusted the focus of his powerful marine-glasses, sweeping the waste for some discoloration of the water. A mile ahead a flock of sea-birds hovered, a sure sign of shallows where they are to be expected. Going forward, he aroused the slumbering native.

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The man started, alert at the touch. He was powerfully built, though the corded muscles and gray, crisp hair showed the marks of age. His eyes looked surlily at Boone, with bloodshot whites and inflamed lids, proclaiming the diver and fisherman who sought his catch beneath the surface, sweeping the reef-fish into a net while he clung to the coral.

"Reva Reef?" asked the skipper.

"*Ai*," grunted the native.

"How much water stopalong?"

"Two fathom belong along this side—top water. *Lele* water sou' side."

"Two fathoms. Six-foot fall. It's about low tide now," said Boone. "There's water breaking at the far end of the shoal. Slow down a little," he told the engineer.

"*Ja*," said the German, whose English was somewhat limited, and shifted to half-speed.

Boone stood in the bows.

"You fetchalong buoy," he commanded the native, who went aft and brought the contrivance to Boone, coiling the chain for a clear delivery. The purple water had changed to brown that turned to amber in the center of the unborn atoll. A bank of seaweed spread its great fronds to port.

"Stop her," cried Boone. "Steady, Haley." The launch rocked on the swell as the young skipper heaved the lead. "Two fathoms," he announced, as the launch moved slowly ahead. "One and a half—less a quarter. Back her. Over with it, Torua! Smartly now! That's good. Half-speed reverse. Now ahead. Swing her out, Haley!"

The vermilion drum bobbed and swung to its anchor, the tin can on its top flashing in the sunshine.

"Due east, Haley. Straight for Vaenga. We've got work to do."

The launch drove for the island still hidden behind the sea-rim and Boone settled himself to search the horizon for signs of a sail.

"They may wait till morning, but we can't afford to lose time," he thought. "When we make the island, Haley," he said aloud, "there's an opening on this side, Torua says. There may be some natives there, but the village is to the east. No use disturbing them. They may be standing in with Sleeth."

"He may be there now," suggested Haley.

"Got to run the chance of that. We've got to mask the launch."

Running at top speed, they soon raised the palms of the low-lying island, and, skirting the barrier reef, found the opening under the pilotage of the native. Boone dropped anchor in the quiet lagoon and leaving the engineer they rowed the little tender to the sandy beach. In half an hour they had felled two young cocopalms and cut some heavy branches of broad-leaved breadfruits, stowed them aboard and were speeding apparently unnoticed toward the shoals once more.

Giving them a wide berth, Boone ordered the engines stopped five miles to the westward of them, and all hands went to work under his directions. The palms were lashed to the port gunwale, one heavy clump of leaves masking the wheelhouse, the other the combined engine-room and cabin. The breadfruit branches were woven here and there in a natural tangle until the screen hid the port-side completely, with little openings here and there for peepholes.

Boone took the tender and rowed off to survey the effect. Even at a short distance the launch was completely masked behind what seemed a mass of driftage, common enough in those wind-swept waters, where every sudden gale uproots the shallow-soiled palms and shrubs and sends them voyaging to plant new islands from their nuts and pods.

"The drift sets right," he said returning. "Keep her broadside on, Haley. We'll turn over the engines often enough to keep her well up. I hardly think they'll come tonight, but we'll keep close watch. Moonrise at twelve-fifteen. Let's eat before it's dark."

ALL about them the stage was being set in the never-wearying transformation-scene of a tropic sunset. To the east and windward the trade-clouds, banked in a mighty argosy, began to glow like masses of opal matrix. The western sky changed swiftly in chameleon hues, from blue to orange, then to a vivid green in which swam clouds of crimson and purple, golden-fringed, blending, fading, faster than the eye could pass. Swiftly, as if some invisible hand were letting down curtain after curtain of gauze across the mighty auditorium, the zenith deepened to violet, grading down to olive at the sea-line.

Another instant and all the sky-dome was

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deep translucent purple, save where the ghostly trade-clouds, warm gray with hints of chrome, sailed in stately squadron. A myriad stars broke through their glittering points simultaneously, switched on by the Master-electrician. The waves took up their flecks of light here and there, a little zephyr wandered from the land in puffs that gradually strengthened to a steady breeze, the ocean—or the sky—seemed to give a long, low sigh of contentment, and the world settled down to sleep.

"The wind's setting us over too hard," said Boone. "They couldn't spot us now anyway. Head her up toward the shoals for about fifteen minutes, Haley, then put on this headgear for a spell. If the call comes from Von der Mehden it will be in five short taps, three long ones, then five short again, repeated twice. After that, I've got the code in my note-book."

The hours slipped by, marked by the march of the stars. Every little while Boone ordered the engines started, and, despite the drag of the trees, they made half-speed till the shoals sounded a warning. The launch showed no lights save for the buried gleam of the engineer's electric torch, and Boone constantly searched the sea with his powerful night-glasses for some sign of the *Ghost*.

Close to midnight part of the horizon was suffused with a pearly glow, and presently, on skytime, the great moon peered above the water, then seemed to bound free, eager to pass along its arching trail, throwing a path of molten silver on an ebon sea. Creeping veils of phosphoresence glowed in the wake of the launch.

Just as the lower rim of the moon, distorted from it's circle, cleared the sea, the shadow of a schooner, topsails bent, all headsails set, glided across the disk. A moment and she passed, blending with the night.

"The *Ghost!*" exclaimed Boone. "Start her, Bockstatt. Haley, keep her up."

He dived into the cabin and brought out two repeating-rifles. One he gave to Haley as he took off the helmet and went forward to the wheel, one he had already left with Bockstatt, the third he retained for himself. He felt the automatic at his belt, hesitating as he glanced at the native, sitting aft by the wires.

"Better not," he muttered and took up the glasses.

Held by her helm the launch sidled toward the shoals, keeping clear of the moon-path. The oncoming schooner, reaching on the breeze, now slackening once more, crossed the silver trail, her side-lights darkened, one light burning aft in her cabin like a malignant eye. Boone kept her covered with his shaded lenses, a dark, swiftly gliding blot upon the water. The light disappeared and the faint rattle of boom-tackles came across the water.

"She's heading up for the buoy," said Boone. "Hold us as we are."

The moonlight played upon the breakers at the southern end of the reef, sounding more softly as the tide raised. The wind had died to puffs again as the schooner, gliding ghostwise as befitted her name, shut off the sight of the argent-sheeted foam. The rattle of a chain came to their ears, followed by the sounds of lowering a boat.

"She's anchored," said Boone. "Breeze is all gone. She's likely to stay there for the dawn wind. Hold us steady. Have your rifles handy. They may get suspicious and try to investigate. If they do, we'll cover them from ambush. If we can hold up a boatload, we can take them off for hostages and soon clear up the trouble."

The lookouts on the schooner had evidently seen the buoy and had no eyes for the launch behind her mask of foliage. The click of oars came to the watchers. A shout sounded, then the sound of oars again, and, presently, the rattle of the in-haul of the anchor-chain.

Then came the pulsing of an engine, the gleam of the cabin-lamp as the schooner came about.

"By thunder, she's got an engine," said Boone.

"*Zwei* cylinder," said Bockstatt. "She don't make more den eight knot, yet."

"How big a radius have we got?" asked Boone. "How far can we follow her?"

"Von der Mehden gif us all der gasoline in der station," said the German. "We come eighty, ninety miles. Yes? Ninety back. We are gut for three, four hunderd, maype. Der engine run fine."

"After them, then! If we can't hold 'em, we'll cut loose the trees, though I'd rather hold them till daylight if we can. Then we'll hide till she's topsails down. Keep on her quarter, Haley. Don't lose that light."

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THE chase commenced. Despite the drag the big launch held the light of the schooner at even distance to Boone's delight.

"Up to date, is Mister Sleeth," he said. "If his headquarters are anywhere within our radius, which is likely, we've accomplished our end. At the worst, we can get some idea of his general course before he shakes us. I wish we could have cut out that boat, though."

For two hours they trailed the light, fearing every moment it might be extinguished and bring the risk of closer convoy. Suddenly they seemed to gain upon it rapidly and Boone slowed and then stopped the engines. There was no sound of another exhaust in the silent dark. The wind had entirely failed.

"That's funny," muttered Boone. "They couldn't have anchored out here."

The engineer put his head through the cabin window.

"Engine proke down, berhabs," he said.

"Then they could hear ours. I don't like it. Torua, you get along boat with me. We tow *lele* while."

He wrapped the thole-pins of the little tender with cloth to muffle them, and, tugging lustily at their oars, the launch crept onward toward the light, which appeared to remain stationary. In about half an hour Boone stopped rowing and took up his glasses. The light showed clear in the lens, but there was no bulk of a vessel surrounding it. Close by, as it rose on the swell, a star gleamed like a twin.

"Throw off that line, Torua!" he commanded and bent to his oars. In a few minutes they were up with the light, a lantern swung from a triangle of light spars, lashed to a hastily assembled raft.

"Tricked!" exclaimed Boone as he surveyed the piratical will o' the wisp. "We've lost them. They must have seen us after all."

To guess the direction taken by the schooner in that dark sea-wilderness was impossible. The moon soared mockingly, the stars glittered coldly, but nowhere, strain his vision through the glasses as he would, could he catch a glimpse of the *Ghost*.

"Sneaked off under bare poles, I suppose," he said bitterly. "Played me for a shallow-brained kid. I guess I am."

The quick reversal of his hopes filled him with momentary despair and self-denunciation, but, true to type, his spirit rebounded with a call to action. They took up their oars again and picked up the launch. Haley was waiting for them at the gunwale, peering anxiously into the night.

"I got the call," he said before Boone could speak. "Repeated the whole thing three times. I put it down."

Boone took out his note-book and opened it at the page where he had set down the little code, reading aloud by the moonlight, that, serving them this purpose, helped by the very contrast of its brilliance to aid in the escape of the schooner.

"Call: five short—three long—five short. Twice.
Come back. Urgent: Six short—six short.
Concerning Miss Newell: Four long—four short."

"They gave me the whole thing," said Haley, handing over his scrap of paper for comparison. "Got to go back? Where's the schooner?"

"Lost it," said Boone curtly, and described the ruse. Haley responded with a volley of sea-oaths.

"Sandalwood Sleeth!" he ended. "*Slippery* Sleeth, I call him."

"Thanks for the swearing, Haley," responded Boone. "I haven't your gift. Let's get this truck clear and then full speed back."

A little after three o'clock, Boone awoke Torua.

"Pretty close along Reva Reef?" he asked.

The native rose and went forward.

"*Aore*—no!" he said returning. "Reva no come longatime yet."

"You're deaf or crazy," cried Boone angrily, as his trained ear caught the low beat of breakers ahead.

He ran to the bows, leaving the native alone in the cockpit. He could see the gleam of the nigh end of the shoals, nearly covered now, not a quarter of a mile away and dead ahead. He swung angrily, to feel the launch losing way.

"Here!" he cried. "Full speed astern, Bockstatt. Full speed *astern*, I tell you!"

The German, tinkering over his engine, growled in foreign guttural.

"Der engine proke down," he snapped over his shoulder.

A sheet of gray foam hissed to starboard, another to port, as, still forging slowly ahead, the launch entered a lane in the trap

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of sharp-toothed coral reef, awash in the flood.

"Fix it!" Boone cried. "Torua, tumble into that tender. Over with it! We've got to tow her out."

THE native was nowhere to be seen. Boone jumped to where the little dinghy had been stowed inboard. As he strained at it, the keel of the launch grated, bumped, grated again and came to rest.

Boone shouted to Haley and the two tossed the tender into the water, bent a line to the bows of the launch and strove with cracking muscles to budge the heavy craft, without success.

"Tide's falling, too," said Haley pantingly. "—— that Kanaka. Where'd he go?"

"To the sharks, I hope."

"Slippery Sleeth again?"

"I suppose so. He'll have a long swim before he earns his reward."

"Can he make it?"

"Swims like a fish. Went off under water. If it was only daylight I'd put a leak in his skull. Come on, we've got to fix that engine."

"I god id." Bockstatt announced as they clambered aboard the launch. "Look here." He exploded again into a volley of German expletive.

"Torua!" commented Boone as he followed the beam of the electric torch.

The copper feed-pipe from the main gasoline-tank aft in the covered stern was pinched flat, nipped in three places by some blunt-nosed instrument.

"Carried a pair of pliers in his loin-cloth," said Boone. "Waited his chance and did a good job. Can you fix it?"

"Sure I can," said the engineer confidently. "Put id dakes time. Hold der torch."

He entered the cabin, lit the lamps they had kept dark in the vain pursuit and triumphantly emerged with a coil of copper tubing.

"Dubligate barts," he said with a grin. "I wish id was daylight."

"We've got to get off before that," said Boone, "or we'll scrape the bottom off her on the falling tide when the wind gets up."

By the light of the lamps and the torch they toiled under the directions of the competent but deliberate engineer with growing impatience. The sky-curtain began to tremble in the east, as if about to rise. The stars paled, the phantom clouds took on warmer hues and more definite shape, and the dawn wind began to blow softly. At last the sweating German lifted his head.

"She goes now," he said.

He spun the flywheel and the powerful engine snorted, roared, then settled to a steady clutter. Boone and Haley took to the tow again while Bockstatt threw his levers to reverse. Grating and ripping, the launch backed off the coral. Boone searched for a leak, but the well-chosen timbers seemed to only have been scored beneath. From the stern he directed Haley as they worked out of the treacherous maze of the shoals.

"See anything of the Kanaka?" asked Haley as they finally backed into blue water.

"He's three miles away by this," answered Boone. "I hope I get a chance to settle with him some time. That was a close shave for being hung up for all day. The treacherous cur!"

The launch was headed north once more, cleaving the crystal waters. The sun came up in sudden splendor and the grim chase of the preying and preyed-upon fish commenced with the new day.

"Now I gets me some coffee und a pipe," said Bockstatt complacently, regarding his engine now throbbing regularly. "If I find dot nigger——"

"I wonder," said Boone to himself, "now I wonder if Louis knew just the kind of a blackguard that Torua was?"

At eight o'clock, with Viti Levu well in sight, they picked up the topsails of a schooner standing toward them.

"The *Acme*," pronounced Boone. "They must be in a hurry to bring the news."

In an hour they were within hailing-distance. Von der Mehden, flourishing a megaphone, came to the rail of the schooner.

"Miss Newell!" he shouted. "She has disappeared!"

CHAPTER IV

THE GRATITUDE OF LEVUKA LOUIS

IN THE cabin of the *Acme*, Boone, Thurlowe and Von der Mehden held council while the launch made its own course to Levuka under the guidance of Bockstatt.

"All I know, and it seems all there is to know," said Thurlowe, "is that a message

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of some sort came to the Queen Hotel early last evening, while I was aboard Adams's barkentine trying to persuade him to join us. Miss Newell, accordin' to Mrs. Johnstone, was all in a ferment. She paid her bill an' packed her bag an' off she went to meet you."

"To meet me?"

"The message was supposed to be from you. Ef I'd bin there I'd hev held her back or gone with her, but I hadn't bin able to see Adams an' I calculated on gettin' back to the hotel inside of an hour." The skipper spoke deprecatingly, tugging at his beard as if in self-punishment. "They've played us for a set of suckers clean through," he growled.

"They took me for one," said Boone, and rapidly told the incidents of the floating light and Torua's treachery. "I might have known they wouldn't have played so open a hand without holding the cards. I had the launch masked all right, but either we were spotted on Vaenga or Torua got some signal to them unknown to us."

"Soon as I found the girl was gone," went on Thurlowe, "I tried to get track of her. Three schooners cleared about sundown, an' one, the *Crest of the Wave*, went out earlier in the afternoon. That's the one that turned the trick, I'm thinkin'. I know the rest of the skippers."

"*Crest of the Wave?* I never heard of it," said Boone.

"Nobody else till a few days ago. Came up from the Loyaltys, the skipper said. A sallow-complected chap thet kep' his mouth shut. Said his name was Capwell an' he was after turtle. He was at Louis' night afore last an' he was one of them that left soon after you did. He didn't show himself ashore again—maybe you potted him after all on the beach—an' as I say he went out afore the others in the afternoon. Took a tack offshore, an' squared for the south-'ard, they tell me. I reckon he made for some anchorage between Levuka and Moau—there's sev'ral breaks in the reef—an' sent his message from there."

"Who brought it?"

"Native, Mrs. Johnstone claims. Spoke fair English. I feel pretty sure it was Capwell. Anyways the gel's gone."

"Sleeth, or Cree, has had track of her right along," declared Boone. "They were anxious to see who she talked with. Of course she had to get some one to help her set the buoy, but they relied on her anxiety for her father to keep her away from the authorities. Then this Capwell saw me read the letter and they made sure by kidnapping her in my name. I've messed it, thoroughly," he concluded, his clenched fists resting uneasily on the table as if they were already at grips with Cree.

"Don't see what else you could have done," said Thurlowe. "But we'll get her and Newell, too. There's a long score to be wiped out, once we get started."

"Adams coming with us?"

"He's got to go up to Vanua Levu. Got a charter from there to Malayta. He's not altogether his own man. Menzies may go, but I doubt it, unless he sees his way clear to a pot. He's over canny—which is the Scotch for stingy, I take it. Now the point is, where do we go first?"

"*Ja*," said Von der Mehden. "I'm with you to the finish, but where do we go? We thought you'd want to come back when Miss Newell was missing, under any conditions, so I started sending about midnight."

"I'm glad you did," said Boone. "It's no good going on a wild chase after Capwell. Worse than hunting a needle in a haystack with his start. We've got just one card, that's Matemotu."

"Hmph!" ejaculated Thurlowe. "More needle hunting."

"We've got to find it," cried Boone, hitting the table with his fist. "Why, think of it! That girl exposed to the will of those blackguards! It sets me crazy to think of it. There's more to it than you realize."

He told them of the episode of Sam Cree aboard Newell's schooner the *Pleiades*.

"*Gott!*" exclaimed Von der Mehden standing up. "As long as I can travel, Captain Boone, count on me."

He extended his hand across the table, and Boone, rising, gripped it. Thurlowe followed their example, and the three pledged their manhood in the little cabin.

LIVES are simple in the South Seas, and impulses primitive, all the stronger for being unhampered by the dictates of conventionality. Love and hate, honor and friendship are affairs of reality, weighed in the scales of action and seldom found light. Men are measured by simple standards and such judgments do not often fail. Boone and Thurlowe knew the other by what each had achieved and

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both accepted the chubby, impulsive German on the rating-gage of those latitudes, the ability to sense the innate worth of another.

The task before them challenged their manliness and in each other's eyes and hand-grips they knew they were equal to the test.

"Matemotu it is," said Thurlowe. "I've a strong suspicion Louis could give a close guess to the position, but I'm leery of Louis. He's in too many deals that are shady, to say the least of them. I don't say he's in open league with Sleeth, mind you, but——"

"I've a way to get Louis to talk," said Boone. "I'll try it."

"It's our only chance," answered Thurlowe. "If you've got any real call on him, he'll pay the debt, I'll answer for that. I'd hate to be his debtor, though. The man's a smug spider. We must be close in. Let's go on deck."

"If you'll get hold of Menzies," said Boone as they stood at the rail, the schooner heading for the reef entrance, "Von der Mehden and I will tackle Mrs. Johnstone again. If you'll come," he added to the German.

"*Ach*," replied Von der Mehden. "I told you this was my vacation. This will be better than visiting trading-stations. They can wait. And anything you want from the company you can haf—on one condition."

"What's that," asked Boone.

"You call me Otto."

Mrs. Johnstone received them in melancholy mood, her favorite attitude toward life.

"Hit's 'orrible, gentlemen," she said, dabbing at her eyes with a dingy handkerchief. "Hif Hi'd hany hidea hanyfing was wrong, Hi'd 'ave chased the Kanaka hout hof the 'ouse wif a kettle of b'iling water, I would, afore 'e hever set heyes on the young lydy. The pore, sweet, trusting young thing."

"Was it a letter he brought?" asked Boone.

"A note, hin a henvelope. Sealed, hit was."

"Maybe it's in her room," suggested Von der Mehden.

"Hi've done hup the room," said the landlady. "But hit might be hin the desk. Hi didn't look. She left most hof her fings be'ind 'er. Just took a bit hof a bag, she was in such a 'urry. Hit's from Captun Boone, she ses, hall heager hand hexcited like. Hit's noos from my farver. Hand mebbe both hon hem's dead."

She dabbed at her suspiciously tearless eyes with the dingy rag as she led the way to the girl's room, and opened the door.

Boone lingered on the threshold, glancing into the cool chamber, furnished simply with old-fashioned walnut furniture. Flowers in a bowl stood on a little table by the open window that looked out upon the garden and the sea. Above the odor of the blossoms Boone distinguished the subtle fragrance that he had noticed on the *lanai* when he first met her. The room seemed still to hold something of her identity and he entered it quietly, as if it had been a sanctuary, as indeed it seemed to him. The desk stood by the wall near the table, an empty waste-basket beside it.

"It wasn't in that?" he asked. "Did you empty it?"

"There was nothing hin hit, Captun," said the widow, still sniffling, letting down the front of the desk and exposing a blotting-pad and inkstand with some papers tucked into the pigeonholes that formed the back.

Boone looked over them, then opened a little door that closed the middle partition.

"This looks like it," he said, taking out an envelope that had been hastily opened.

He hesitated a moment, then took out the enclosure.

"The dirty scoundrel!" he said. "Of course he knew she had never seen my writing. He overheard us when we met and knew we were strangers. Read that."

He passed the note to Von der Mehden, who read it aloud.

DEAR MISS NEWELL:

Successful beyond all hopes. But you must come with the bearer at once. Your father is waiting for you. You'll soon be with him again. He is doing well but needs you. RICHARD BOONE.

"He is cunning, that fox," commented the German, folding up the note and handing it back to Boone. "I should like to make him eat it. Do you suppose that means they will take her to her father?"

"I hardly know. I hope so, but I doubt it. They probably put it in to make sure of her coming."

"Brains they haf. But we haf better."

"We'll need them," answered Boone with quiet finality. "That's all, Mrs. Johnstone. Better not say anything about this to any one. I'll keep the letter."

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"Not a word parses my lips," declared the landlady. "They're sealed."

Boone glanced at her and took a crackling five-pound note from his pocketbook.

"For your trouble," he said, handing it to her. Protestingly grateful, she vanished. "That's the best kind of sealing-wax for her type, Otto."

"Ach, Otto is *gut!* As to money, Dick, I haf plenty, if you need any."

"Thanks. I'll call on you if it's necessary. Here comes Thurlowe and Menzies. Let's go on the *lanai*. It's cooler."

"I'll be with you in a minute. I want to be sure the beer is cold." And Von der Mehden vanished in search of the liquid refreshments without which he deemed every prolonged conversation a failure.

The quartet, finally established on the veranda with cigars and liquors convenient to their hands, proceeded to a discussion of ways and means, though it was evident from the first that the Scotchman was not keen on becoming a part of the expedition.

"It's no that I'm not approvin' the idea, ye ken," he said to Boone, stirring the ice in his long glass of amber Scotch and tansan. "But, man dear, ye're gropin' for a black cat on a dark nicht wi'oot a lantern. The guid Lord may ken wheer Sleeth is, but he'll no be tellin' us, I'm thinkin'. An' the de'il looks after his ain.

"He's in Melanesia—somewheer. Draw a line fra' New Guinea to the Fijis here, an' twa lines fra' those points down to Tasmania; thirty degrees o' latitood to cover an' nigh to forty-five o' longitood. It's a far cry! An' ye've naught to go on. Ye canna catch a fox wi'out a scent to follow."

"We're going to Matemotu," said Boone. "I have means of getting the position of that, I'm almost certain."

"An' if ye find it, which I misdoot, tho' I'm no tryin' to dampen your enthoosiasm, ye ken, how d'ye ken ye'll be findin' aught when ye get there? No, laddie, I'm too auld to gang ghost-chasing, though I wish ye luck. Ye're naught but a pack o' children. Thurlowe there, for a' his gray hairs, is just a wanderin' reckless bairn o' the nicht. It's no the siller, mind ye. Thurlowe was tellin' me ye'd recompense me for the loss o' time. But I'm past the age when the crack o' a pistol made me wishfu' to find oot who fired it.

"But I ha' a lad for ye," he went on. "A red-heided whip o' a lad who's a de'il at the fechting. 'Tis Campbell, my supercargo. The lad's been most things, amang them a doctor, as he wad be the noo but for his desire to pu' corks. But he's a rare ane for the fechting, an' I'll lend him to ye."

"Thinkin' of firin' him, Menzies?" queried Thurlowe dryly.

"Nay, he but signed for the trip. I can spare him fra' noo on. He's a restless lad, he'll hae to dree his ain weird, but he's guid bluid i' his veins, an' if ye keep the groglocker tight he should be a gran' help to ye, what wi' the makin' o' wounds an' the fixin' o' them. He's keen to go, ye ken."

"You've not been talking much about the matter, have you?" asked Boone. "It's not every one we can trust just now."

"Tut, man," said Menzies reproachfully. "We're Scotch. At least Campbell's Hielan'. He'll not babble, e'en in his cups. Northern tongues are na hung i' the middle."

"A good man is welcome," said Boone. "Especially since we have to reckon on ourselves. There's no one else you can think of, Thurlowe?"

"No one. But there'll be ten of us whites with your mates and supercargo and mine, counting Von here and Campbell. You can have any of my native boys you want. I can recommend three or four of them. You'll take the *Roamer*, I suppose. She's faster than my *Acme*."

"Yes. I wish I had an engine in her," answered Boone. "I've eight native boys and Ong Chuck, my cook. He's worth three of them. He's by way of having been a pirate himself, I believe, but he's true blue to me. That, with four boys from you, makes twenty-three all told. I hope we can get on more even terms with them by some stratagem or other, but we ought to give a good account of ourselves. It's good Campbell's a doctor. We may need him."

"I can help you with the guns," said Von der Mehden. "We haf a reserve for the new stations. Rifles you'll need, pistols and a little dynamite. It may come in handy. Also Bockstatt comes. He has served and is a good man."

Thurlowe looked at the chubby German approvingly. Von der Mehden radiated enthusiasm.

"Then that makes twenty-four," he said. "Good man." And nodded at Boone.

"I'll tackle Louis," said the latter. "If you, Otto, and Thurlowe 'll look out for the

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weapons and provisioning. Charge anything to the *Roamer*. Will you have Campbell here by supper, Menzies? Early. We'll leave before sundown."

"I will, an' sober," promised the Scotchman. "I'm sorry I'm not ganging wi' ye, but I'm a fearsome body wi' firearms."

Boone and Thurlowe laughed. Menzies' reputation for bravery was far greater than for his interest in other folks' affairs.

"That's all right, Captain," said Boone. "And thank you. Campbell can be your proxy, though I doubt if he'll share the loot with you."

"I like to see what I'm playin' for on the table," said Menzies dryly, finishing his glass and absent-mindedly taking a handful of cigars.

BOONE found Levuka Louis at the Snuggery.

"Can I speak with you alone?" he asked the Frenchman.

Louis looked at him with close-lidded eyes and shrugged his shoulders.

"Of a certainty, *mon brave*," he answered, and led the way through the garden to an open summerhouse, thatched with dried palm-fronds.

"Here I am, *chez moi*," he said. "If any one comes, we see him first. Vat ees it, *mon ami?*"

He seated himself, twirling the fierce spikes of his mustache, surveying Boone keenly the while.

"Louis," said Boone, "my father told me if I ever needed help badly—very badly—to come to you. He said you were in his debt and he assigned it to me."

The little Frenchman clasped his hands across one knee.

"Did he tell you what the debt was?" he asked.

"No."

"Then weel I tell you, since I am to pay. Once, longtime since, I am married."

A mild light came into the trader's shrewd eyes and he looked silently for a while beyond the palms to where the white surf broke on the distant reef. He fumbled in the breast of his silk shirt with one hand and left the fingers there, as if holding a locket.

"She—Marie," he went on presently, "lies on Nukahiva, in the Marquesas. We had a daughter—*petite* Marie. She was like her mothaire, Deeck, *belle, ah, belle*, a lily of France transplant. I am hard, *mon Capitaine*, but with her I am soft, like honey-wax. Too soft sometime, sometime too hard. So I send her to the good Sisters at Tahiti. Ven she come back she is voman. I make the story short. There comes an Englishman to Levuka—I leave the Marquesas ven my vife die—tall, handsome, blond. Marie, she sees him often, too often, and, ven I am away one time she runs avay weeth him on his sheep. Perhaps he means to marry her. I do not know—he is not all bad, this Englishman.

"*Mais*, ven they get to sea—she is young—and of my blood, the blood that runs fast and strong even ven it is old, like good *vin*—she forget vat the good Sisters teach her. And he—he is man—and at each port he forget to marry an' laugh an' kees her from sadness. An' at Tahiti she is ashame to see the Sisters, ashame to see any one, for, look you, there is to be another, an' yet she is not vife. But your father, Deeck, he meets her, an', because he is my fren' an' good man, she tells heem, an' so he has a little talk with the Englishman. An' so they are wed. *Bon.* An' the little one is not bastard, an'—" his eyes flashed—"I do not hav' the blood of my Englishman on my hands."

He paused, his fingers fell idly to his lap as he gazed reefward.

"She is happy?" asked Boone presently.

"*Mais oui, mon ami*," said Louis gently. "She is happy. She lies, she and her *bêbe*, by the side of her mothaire at Nukahiva. But, because your father save her *honneur*, I, Louis, make heem my promise. And my promises I keep, always. Vat ees it you vant? Do not speak too loudly."

Boone lowered his voice.

"I want you to tell me the position of Matemotu, Louis. If you can, the position of Sleeth's headquarters."

Louis sat silent, his eyes narrowed once more, looking steadily out to sea.

"If it is too much——" ventured Boone after a little.

"Perhaps you ask more than you theenk," answered the Frenchman. "It ees not easy to live as I do an' not make strange connections. *Savez vous?* But I hav' promise. Where Sleeth is I do not know, I do not vish to know. This I vill tell you for the sake of my Marie, for the sake of your father and of yourself, Deeck. I think you vill not go wrong eef you go to Matemotu. Ven do you sail?"

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"Sunset."

"*Bon.* You shall haf it before you leave. Let us talk of something else and then part. It ees best not to be togethaire longer. I vish you *bon voyage et bonne fortune*, an' your heart desire."

He looked at the young skipper with keen kindliness and reached up to lay a friendly hand on his shoulder as Boone flushed slightly.

"Nevaire be ashame of love, *mon ami* Deeck," he said. "Go always to meet heem. An' Mees Newell is *belle—comme la lune.*"

The sun was sinking with a swift rush as it always does in the tropics, as if eager to plunge beneath the waves after the day's work. The *Roamer*, chain short and ready to break, headsails loosened for the hoist, flapped her fore and main sails in the eye of the wind. Thurlowe, Von der Mehden and Menzies' *protégé*, Campbell, a quick-eyed, undersized but wiry man, were grouped aft with Boone, watching the shore.

"I think your friend Louis has given you the double cross," said Thurlowe.

"I don't," answered Boone. "Anyhow, we can't leave without the information."

An outrigger canoe joined the fleet of native craft that was gathered about the schooner, the paddlers dickering and chaffing the native crew, endeavoring to sell the last of their fruit and chickens to the imperturbable Ong Chuck. A stalwart islander hailed Boone.

"You want coconut, *Capitani?*" he asked. "Veri fine coconut. This-a-kind *Faranki* (French) nut. *Màiti no*—very good——"

Boone caught the emphasis on the word *Faranki.*

"All right," he said. "You chuckalong one dozen."

The Fijian tossed the green nuts over the rail, holding the last for a second of delay.

"Thisa nut, he best, *Capitani*," he said.

Boone caught it and felt the husk give slightly between his fingers. He threw a dollar to the native.

"*Mahoro*" (thanks), he said. "*Aroha.*"

He turned toward the mates.

"Break her out, Haley," he commanded. "Up jibs. Lively now."

The canoes scattered as the *Roamer* gathered way, and swinging on the land breeze headed for the reef passage. As they cleared the channel, Boone left the deck to Haley, and, with a nod to Thurlowe and Von der Mehden who followed him, went below.

The husk of the twelfth nut had been deftly split and rejoined by the interlacing fibers. The kernel had been cleaned of milk and flesh and held up a scrap of tough paper, folded and sealed with wax.

Boone broke it open, read the contents and passed the paper to Thurlowe, who held it so that Von der Mehden, peering under his arm, could see it.

The message was a brief one.

Matemotu 24. 18. S. 172. 40. E.

CHAPTER V

THE ISLAND OF THE DEAD

DRAW a straight line between Suva, southern port of Viti Levu, and Norfolk Island, the same line the cable takes that angles from Brisbane to Vancouver, and, a little to the east, lies Matemotu, midway from nowhere—as the traders have it—remote, desolate, a burned-out crater thrusting itself up among a tangle of reefs to stem the surge of the great Pacific rollers that ever chafe and beat upon its fire-scarred cliffs.

The steamer lanes from Sydney to Suva, and to Apia, leave it far to north and south, the chart shows the vicinity speckless, the Directory of the Pacific ignores its existence, as it does that of scores of lonely islets and atolls far off the beaten track, many of them unknown to any habitant but the bo'sun birds and their feathered fellow travelers of the windways.

Six hundred miles south-southwest from Levuka, the steady northwest trades sent the *Roamer* reaching toward her goal, topsails set, at a pace that saw five hundred miles registered by the patent log at the end of forty-eight hours.

Swiftly as the schooner sailed, seething through the crisp blue seas, with sheets well started, every inch of canvas urging her onward, the hours dragged to Boone, impatiently pacing the deck watch in and watch out, handling his sails as if he were trying to beat time allowance in an international race. His mood, shared by his comrades, did not hold for them all that it did for him. Though their chivalry was aroused by the thought of the girl's peril, none of them save Thurlowe had ever seen Miss Newell.

The thought of her dainty beauty, of the mind that looked out so serenely from beneath the archway of her brows, becoming seared by contact with the brutalities of

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Sleeth, Cree and their followers, filled Boone with a frenzy that threatened his self-control from sheer lack of definite action.

He urged his spirit desperately to win self-mastery in the hours he trod the deck, and emerged from the struggle in full control, after a fight in which the last of his boyishness sloughed from him, leaving him with a steadfast light in his dark eyes, a firmer line to his lean jaw, and a set invincibility of purpose that drove the native sailors at top effort before him and gave him the utter fealty of Von der Mehden and Campbell, of all his own and Thurlowe's officers. Bockstatt openly praised him, Thurlowe followed him with an approving glance.

"Boone, he goes far," said the engineer to Thurlowe. "He iss *gut* stuff, dot poy."

"Comes of good stock," answered the skipper, "and will hand down better. Also there's a little more than sheer duty in it for him, I fancy, though perhaps he's not aware of it. Miss Newell's a wonderful type of girl. They'd make an ideal pair."

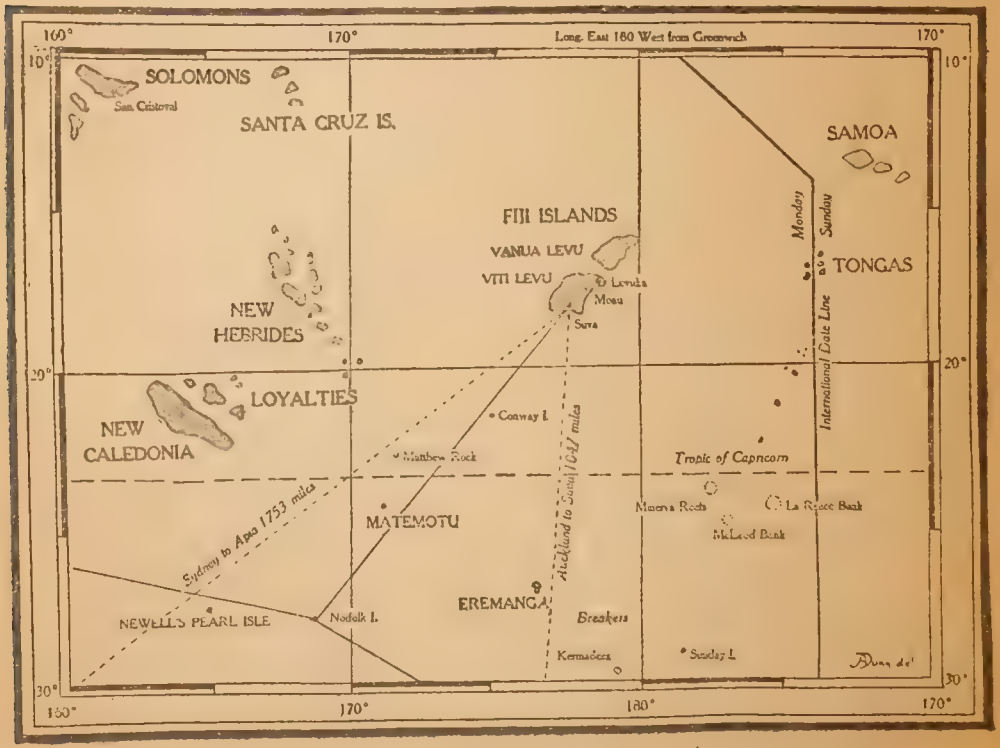
"So? *Romanz*, eh? Dot vill nod hurt any, *nein*."

To Von der Mehden and to the fiery Highlander, Campbell, lean to scragginess, marked with early dissipation, the trip from a jaunt became a mission, leavened by the high resolution of the young leader.

Campbell swore deep and binding oaths to leave liquor alone until the venture was safely ended, a resolution in which he had the full sympathy of Von der Mehden. At the suggestion of Boone, all were served out rifles, pistols and ammunition and practised assiduously at improvised targets aboard and afloat till all showed a certain proficiency.

Von der Mehden, with a German sporting-rifle of high power, easily proved himself the crack shot, performing miracles with drifting bottles. Then came Boone, with his naturally steady nerves and eyes soon assuring him accuracy, and Bockstatt, quick on sight and trigger out of his old army experience. Thurlowe and Sanders, his first mate, were the pistol experts. Ong Chuck, looking on, once took up a rifle and impassively punctured a floating tin with a series of well-placed bullets. The native sailors, never first-class shots, were nevertheless good men, picked and tested in the events of many voyages.

"If we get an opportunity," said Thurlowe, the second night out, "I have an idea



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we may be able to win over some of Sleeth's crowd. A good many of them must have joined under pressure, to save their skins, and I reckon they're sick of it. If it comes to a showdown scrap—but it's small use figurin' on what we'll do beforehand. We ought to pick up Matemotu at dawn, eh Boone?"

"Pretty close to it, if the wind holds. We'll want daylight for the shoals we may run into. I figure to tack at sun-up for the last leg. The way the current's been setting us up there's less than twenty miles of leeway to make. I am going to circle the island first for signs of the *Ghost*, though I hardly think we'll find her. But from what Louis said, we'll not draw altogether a blank."

"Who goes in the landing party?" asked Von der Mehden.

"We can take six in the whaleboat besides the boys," said Boone. "That will be Thurlowe, you Campbell—we may need your medicine chest—Haley, Sanders and myself. We may all get ashore before we leave," he added for the benefit of the disappointed ones.

"Better you take me," put in Ong Chuck. "Me heap sabby pilate."

There was a general laugh amid which the Chinaman grinned complacently.

"S'pose one man he velly sick," he said. "He want good soup, nice fli' chicken. I take along. I fix."

"All right, Ong Chuck, that's not such a bad idea," said Boone. "We'll crowd you in."

AT THE first signs of dawn the topsails were lowered and the *Roamer* headed, closehauled, for Matemotu. At four bells a dot declared itself in the clear horizon, and half an hour later the barren cliffs of a volcanic islet, apparently a little less than a mile in diameter, loomed in plain view, its steep walls whitened by the refuse of birds that rose in a screaming cloud at the approach of the schooner.

Strictly speaking, between the monsoon gales and the trades, there was no true weather side to Matemotu, and the lava cliffs were everywhere hollowed by wind and wave into caverns where the surf roared and spouted. Off shore the bare crests of conical rock masses lifted and breakers showed in white patches at frequent intervals.

Haley stationed himself in the forespreaders to con in and two men were set in the bows to cast a constant lead.

"Nice looking mousetrap," said Boone to Thurlowe as, with slackened sheets, they made a circuit of the island. "The cat doesn't seem to be home though. No sign of the *Ghost*. Not much sign of a landing either, so far, though of course there must be somewhere."

"There's deep water clear up to the cliffs in some places, they say," replied Thurlowe. "I imagine it's goin' to be no easy job gettin' on top though."

There was a hail from Haley in the foretop.

"Smoke ahoy!"

A faint line of brown fumes stained the blue of the sky in a thin column, coming steadily from the interior of the crater.

"A fire," said Boone. "Some one's alive there, that's certain."

"Deep water, clear in," shouted Haley.

Boone and Thurlowe studied the gray, seamed heights that rose so grimly from the water. Even in the brilliant sunshine the place held a sinister gloom of its own, a sepulchral suggestion that well fitted the title Matemotu—The Island of the Dead.

The northern rim of the outlet fire had built so defiantly in the realm of its opposing element was notched irregularly. The glasses discovered one great slab of smooth, wave-chiseled lava that rose sheer for a hundred and fifty odd feet from what appeared to be a natural wharf of flat rocks. At the top of this slab projected a stout spar, driven into some crevice of the cliff, and from the spar to the rim showed faint traces of a trail.

"There's the landing." The two skippers spoke the sentence simultaneously.

"The schooner'll stand off and on," ordered Boone. "Cover the landing with your rifles from the rail, Brown," he commanded his second mate. "Ready away with the port boat there."

The landing-party assembled their equipment, the native boys swung the whaleboat into the water, quiet save for a long rolling ground-swell, and made the stout ash blades bend as they raced for the landing, Thurlowe at the steering-oar, Boone in the bows, watching the best means of approach to the wharf which on closer inspection showed signs of having been squared to a better level by man's handiwork.

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As the natives handily brought the whale-boat alongside, fending off from the rocks, Boone sprang on the slippery basalt, wet with the spray, the white men following him, Ong Chuck close at their heels. Stout rings had been set in the rock and to these the boat was moored, two boys remaining in it to keep it clear while four joined their officers. A cable's length away the *Roamer* sailed in short tacks with Bockstatt in charge of the covering-battery of rifles.

Boone coiled in his hand a light lead-line he had brought in the boat.

"Stand clear," he said as the end of the line with the lead whirred in a close circle from his hand.

His arm suddenly lengthened, the lead shot upward, arching the cord above the spar, and falling, bearing the slack with it, to his feet. He bent on a stouter line of tough manila and soon had a double rope about the spar. This the native boys held taut as their skipper, a block and line about his neck, clambered up the surface of the cliff, using his feet against the lava wall to aid the muscles of his arms. Once on the spar, he seated himself astride and deftly lashed the block and reeved through one end of the rope. Thurlowe tied a loop in the other and set foot in it.

"Tail away there," cried Boone, and the husky natives hoisted Thurlowe, followed by the rest of the party, up to the side of Boone, on a narrow ledge from which ran a rough path to the summit.

From the rim they looked into the basin of the crater, dipping down in an abrupt slope hummocked with lava and crumbling tufa, whitened with guano, down a hundred feet to a rocky plain sparsely covered with low shrubs. One side lay in deep shadow that sprawled across the floor to the sunnier slope where myriads of birds, their first alarm stilled, gathered in the sunshine, straddling their eggs or squawking in ever-shifting groups.

Here and there appeared the mouths of rifts and caves, and, in front of one of them, level with the bottom of the bowl, rose the thin thread of smoke from a smoldering fire of brush. Aside from the perpetual squabble of the birds, there was no sound of life, and they commenced to scramble down the brittle slope.

THE gaunt figure of a man, heavily bearded, clad in torn shirt and canvas trousers, appeared in the mouth of the cave by the fire, gazing upward, with one hand above his eyes. Suddenly he uttered a hoarse cry and came striding toward them, scattering the fire in his unheeding haste.

Thurlowe looked at the approaching

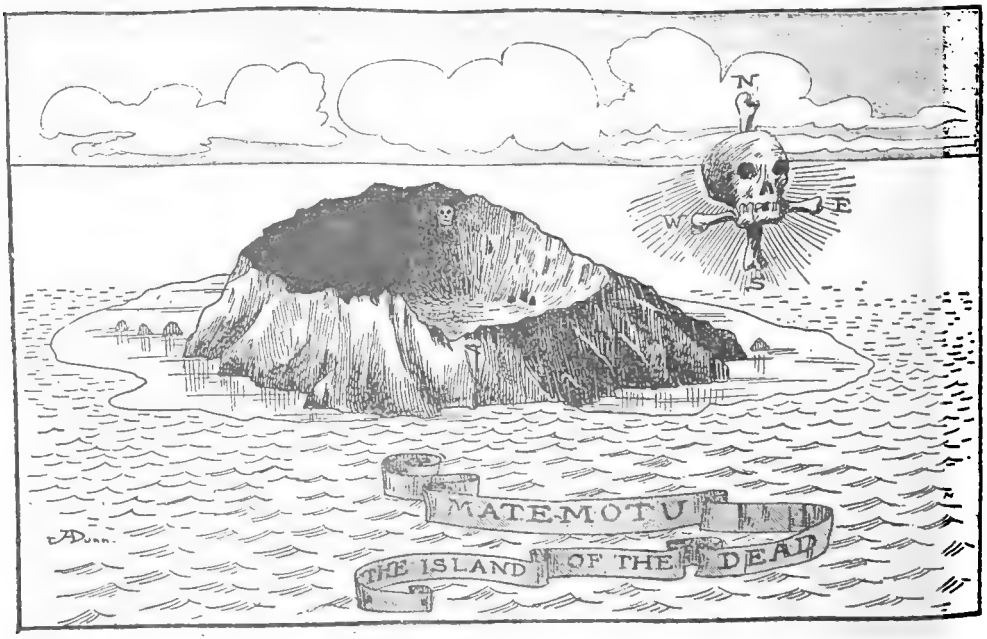

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figure through his glasses with a puzzled expression. Then he lowered the binoculars.

"By God! it's Huddy," he cried. "Huddy, ahoy!"

The man broke into a staggering run, stumbled to his knees and stayed in that position with outstretched arms, his face working, tears streaming from his eyes, little inarticulate sounds coming from his cracked lips as they grouped about him.

Boone knelt beside him with a flask of brandy. The marooned skipper sucked chokingly at the fiery liquor and gained his feet, looking at them with wonder that broke into laughter that he could not check.

"Steady there, mon," said Campbell, slipping one arm about him. "Ye're gettin' hysteerical. Tak' another sip o' the liquor."

Huddy stared about the little circle.

"At last," he said chokingly. "Thurlowe —and Boone's boy!" He grasped their hands as if in the grips he found tangible proof of safety. "Years it's been," he went on, "though Newell says it's only three."

"Is Newell here?" cried Boone.

"In the cave," replied Huddy, some color coming to his cheeks, his nervous ague ceasing. "He and the Other One. Both alive. Three of us alive—and a thousand dead."

He pointed at the crater walls.

"The caves are full of their bones," he went on, lowering his voice. "Their ghosts come out of nights, hundreds of them. I used to talk to them, till Newell came. It's not good to talk to ghosts. They tell you too much." He shuddered. "The Other One, he hardly talks at all. He's afraid of the ghosts. It's silly to be afraid. I always said so when I was my own man. I was a captain once, you know," he asserted. "You may not believe it, but I was."

"Surely, Huddy, we know," assured Boone. "And will be captain again. As soon as you've rested up a bit and got away from here."

"Who's the Other One?" asked Thurlowe.

"He won't tell. He's—" Huddy's voice sank to the merest whisper—"he's one of Sleeth's men."

"Sleeth's?"

Huddy nodded.

"He's got the mark on his arm. But he hates Sleeth. He hides when Sleeth comes. He wants him to think he is dead. Some day he's going to kill Sleeth. He's living for it. So am I."

His emaciated form wavered and Campbell let him sink to the ground gently.

"Give me some of that soup," he said to Ong Chuck.

The Chinaman produced a thermos bottle, part of Von der Mehden's equipment, and the Scotchman slowly fed him beef tea.

"Haley, you stay with him," said Boone. "We'll find Newell. Campbell, we'll likely need you. He must be too ill to show himself."

They started across the crater floor for the cave, relieved at the news, yet fearful of Newell's condition.

"It's evident Miss Newell hasn't been brought here," said Boone. "I hope we can get the position of Sleeth's headquarters from this Other One, as poor Huddy calls him. I suppose he's quarreled with Sleeth and they've marooned him here. That's what Louis meant, Thurlowe, when he said I'd not be wrong in coming to Matemotu."

Thurlowe nodded. His face was set. The sight of Huddy, half crazed by his imprisonment in that hell-hole, had filled him anew with the grim determination of a private *vendetta* of his own.

THEY entered the low mouth of the cave, a blow-out in the lava, and explored its tortuous recesses with an electric torch. The air was tainted, the floor foul with the bones and feathers of seabirds. Dried twigs covered the rough floor.

A tunnel led to a rudely circular chamber in which a man lay moaning feebly, a dirty bandage about his head, his shoulder bound in another soiled cloth. His open eyes were bright with fever, a mat of hair covered neck and chin and cheeks, but failed to hide the deep hollows of starvation and disease.

Campbell lifted a wrist to test the pulse and laid one hand on his forehead.

"Burnin' oot wi' fever," he pronounced. "We'll ha' to get him oot o' here."

A voice, weak and broken, came from the blackened lips. For all its lack of vitality it held a dignity of purpose that told of the will still master of the fever-beleagured brain.

"It's no use, Sleeth. No use, man. I won't tell."

It was hard for Boone to realize that this wreck, unkempt, foul, a shell of manhood, was the Captain Newell he had known, firm of flesh and muscle, with clean-shaven, ruddy face, the father of Marion.

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"Is he dangerously ill?" he asked Campbell, thanking the impulse that had prompted Menzies to turn an unsatisfactory supercargo into a helpful doctor.

"He's had a bullet thru' the shoulder," said Campbell who had been examining his patient with deft tenderness. "But it's oot. An' another ploughed a furrow i' the side o' his heid. They've no been tended, but the man's bluid must ha' been pure an' he'll pu' thru wi' care. He's been a gran' upstandin' man."

"Thurlowe, will you undertake rigging a sling at the spar?" asked Boone, and the elder skipper left the cave.

Huddy came in with Haley, walking like an aged man, but steadily. Something stirred at the far end of the rock chamber. Boone flashed the torch at the sound and saw a shadow disappear into a rift.

"That's the Other One," said Huddy. "He thinks you're Sleeth's men. He's not afraid of me. I'll get him and we'll give him something good to eat. You get terribly tired of eggs and sea-gull," he said with the plaintive childishness that marked his deep voice with curious pathos. "And the water's bad," he added, "and not much of it."

"We're going to get Newell aboard," said Boone. "You'll come, Huddy, and the Other One?"

"I'll come," said Huddy eagerly. "But get Newell there first. I've been afraid he'd die and then there'd be another ghost. I couldn't stand that. There are too many now. There's Barkhausen and Renton, Kennedy and Wahlgren and Gregg——"

"You mean they are all buried here?" asked Boone, aghast at the apt roll-call of the missing men he had listened to Thurlowe reciting at Levuka Louis'.

Huddy nodded.

"Dead and buried. I've talked with them," he said earnestly. "Gregg was the last. He buried them in a cave. There's no soil. They have no real graves. That's why they can't rest, I suppose. Gregg wrote all their names on a board, but it isn't a regular tombstone. Then he died. And there are natives, hundreds of them, with an old chief leading them. I'm not afraid of them. They are all waiting for Sleeth."

"We're not," said Boone. "We're going after him. Do you know where he is? Or Newell?"

Huddy shook his head.

"The Other One does, I think. But he won't talk, you know."

One of the native boys who had been left on the wharf entered the cave.

"*Kapitani* Newell say all ready walk-along," he said.

Outside were three more natives and, in a litter improvised in a spare sail, they bore Newell to the rim of the crater and lowered him gently to the spar where he was transferred to the bosun's chair arranged by Thurlowe.

As they carried him he babbled incessantly his steady thought.

"It's no use Sleeth. No use, I tell you, man. No use. I won't tell."

They soon had him stowed in the whaleboat, Campbell and Thurlowe going off with him to the schooner. The rest stayed with Huddy in the hope of getting some information from the man who had once been one of Sleeth's piratical gang.

"You stay outside the cave," said Huddy. "I'll get the Other One."

He disappeared and they could hear him calling coaxingly to his mysterious companion. Presently he came out with a cautious finger to his lips.

"He's listening," he said warningly. "He says if you will swear by the Holy Virgin that you are not in league with Sleeth, he will come out." Raising his voice, he called: "Listen, Other One. Here are five men. They will take the oath. Answer one at a time—" he turned back to them—"do you swear to the Holy Virgin that you hate Sleeth and all his works?"

Boone glanced at his companions.

"I swear," he said loudly, followed by Von der Mehden, Haley, Sanders, and, at a nod from his skipper, Ong Chuck.

A DARK face, like an ancient skull, with its hollow eyes, protruding bones, the tight-stretched skin, pox-pitted, the color of weathered bone, black hair straggling in wisps from a cotton handkerchief about the brows, peeped furtively from the cave-mouth, the eyes looking about with the fearfulness of a trapped animal.

Boone raised his hand once more.

"We swear," they repeated in unison.

"We are going to wipe Sleeth and his gang out of existence," said Boone earnestly. "We are on your side. Don't be afraid."

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The figure came out into the sunlight and stood blinking at them. His only garment was the remnant of a pair of canvas trousers, barely covering his loins. His bony, sun-leathered body was marred by scars. On one side crushed ribs had healed in a great puckering scar. His right hand had turned inward at the wrist, the fingers seemingly grown together, like a withered claw.

On the forearm, through the dirt that scaled him, showed the tattooing of a skull with a bone between its teeth. He looked from one to the other, seemingly gathering courage at their reassuring nods and smiles.

Ong Chuck offered him the thermos bottle, still half filled with savory soup. He sniffed at the tempting odor and put out the uncanny claw, taking the bottle in its stiff hollow and tilting it grotesquely toward his mouth. Ong Chuck patted him on the shoulder.

"You all light," he said, as the man gulped noisily at the beef tea. "Me you fliend. You sabby? All fliend."

"That's strange," said Huddy almost petulantly. "He never let me touch him. And we've been friends for a hundred years, though Newell says it's only three."

"You handle him, Ong Chuck," said Boone. "He seems to have taken a fancy to you. Try and get him aboard."

With the Chinaman's hand about his shoulders, the man suffered them to lead him to the top of the cliff and looked eagerly and long at the schooner. But when they attempted to get him to the sling, he protested, shaking his head and struggling violently.

"He won't leave the island," said Huddy. "He's waiting for Sleeth, I tell you. Some day, when he's not afraid, he's going to kill Sleeth. Isn't that right, Other One?"

The man nodded vehemently.

"Well," said Boone, "you'll come, Huddy? We'll bring him back some clothes and food. Ong Chuck, you stay with him."

He drew Huddy aside.

"You say he knows Sleeth's whereabouts?"

"Yes. Sometimes he talks. I think he was one of Sleeth's best men."

"Well, he's our only hope. They've got Newell's daughter, you know."

Huddy sank his grip into the muscles of Boone's forearm.

"Ned's girl!" he exclaimed. "Then we've got to go soon—now!" He tugged at Boone's arm, urging him to the trail. "I tell you we must sail now. You don't know those devils."

"I know," said Boone grimly. "But we've yet to find out where—from him."

The Other One was hunkered on the rim of the crater, huddled in a bony heap. Ong Chuck was asquat beside him still patting his shoulder soothingly. At Boone's gesture he left the man and came over to the rest.

"He all light with me, Cap'n," he said. "You think he sabby where you want go?"

"Yes."

"I find out sure. Cap'n, you find topside my chest, in galley, one plate. He in sandalwood box in cloth. You bling when you come back. You bling sure. You see."

They left the strange pair together and reached the whaleboat which had returned for them.

"What's he going to do with the plate?" asked Von der Mehden.

"I don't know," confessed Boone. "He's a strange proposition, is Ong Chuck. Best judge of pearls I know. Got plenty of money of his own. He dares not go back to China for some reason and he appears to have adopted me. He seems to be well read in his own lore. I know that everywhere we go the Chinks all seem to think he is a big Joss. I'll fetch the plate."

"The Other One never let me touch him," complained Huddy. "And we've been friends for a century, in there."

He pointed back to the crater with the two figures still asquat on the rim.

They found Newell clean and comfortable in a bunk, asleep. Campbell pronounced him certain of recovery.

"Sleep an' nourishment, an' kindly faces are what he wants," he said. "I've reduced his fever. He'll be fine when he wakes up this evening. Noo, Mister Huddy, we'll fix you up wi' a bath an' some clean linen."

"A bath," exclaimed Huddy. "That's fine." And he went off with the Scotchman happily.

"Three years in that hole," said Thurlowe, joining them. "And see what it's done to him. He's childish."

"He'll be all right again soon," said Boone. "What do you think of the Other One, as Huddy calls him?"

"I imagine he's been in some run-in with Sleeth or Cree and they beat him up till he was useless and then marooned him.

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Thought it a better joke than killing him. He seems more scared than demented. We've got to get that position out of him. Why didn't you bring him along?"

"Couldn't without driving him insane altogether. Are you going back with me? He's made friends with Ong Chuck and the Chinaman thinks he can make him talk. Otto, you'll come. We'll take Campbell."

THEY found Ong Chuck and his *protégé* at the mouth of the cave. The former was talking in pigeon English and the skeleton face of his listener bore a smile. On Campbell's advice they refrained from giving him more food, but handed the clothes they had brought to Ong Chuck, who spread them out garment by garment, indicating by gestures that the gift was for the creature who gazed at them with timid rapture and with a sudden rush gathered them up and fled into the cave.

"You bling plate?" asked Ong Chuck.

Boone produced the shallow box of sandalwood, cunningly carven, wrapped in silk brocade. The Chinaman opened the strange brass lock with touches on protruding studs and revealed a plate set snugly in the lining of padded raw silk.

"You tell me what you want find out, Cap'n," he said as they examined the plate.

It was of exquisite translucent porcelain, set with designs in red and black of concentric circles and square ideographic figures, like miniature plans of intricate mazes. As Ong Chuck took it from the box and gently moved it in a circle the patterns whirled and blended with a strange effect of dizziness.

"Hypnotism!" cried Von der Mehden.

Ong Chuck chuckled.

"All same hypnotism," he said. "You speak what you want. I think. He speak."

"I believe he can do it," said Boone. "We've solved the mystery, Thurlowe. You know, Ong Chuck, we want to find out the latitude and longitude of where Sleeth is."

"I sabby plenty. Better you go away *lele* while."

The three walked off and sat behind a rib of lava that protruded from the crater wall.

"Ong Chuck is a good navigator himself," said Boone. "He can handle a sextant as well as I can. Look, here comes the Other One."

The Other One, clad in fresh white ducks, his hair and beard black against the coat, appeared at the entrance of the cave. Ong Chuck spoke to him and they sat down facing each other. The Chinaman showed him the plate and shifted it gently in narrowing circles, the man watching every movement. Presently they saw the thin figure stiffen and Ong Chuck bend forward, making passes before him with his hands. A few sentences were exchanged, the man sitting rigidly, and then the Chinaman laid the relaxed body of his subject in the shade, set back the plate in its box and came triumphantly toward them.

"All ri'," he said quietly. "He sleep now, long time."

"Did you get it?"

"Sure. He look plate. Bimeby he go sleep. I speak, you all same officer fo' Sleeth. You sabby island. No this island. Other place Sleeth stop all time. You want go there. You speak me how sail ship. Latitood, long'tood. He speak ri' away. Twenty-fi' ten sou', one hundled seventy-fo' nineteen. Elemanga Island. Leef open sou' side. Bealing three palm one notch in mountain. Lagoon ha' mile west."

"Eremango. Twenty-five ten, one hundred and seventy-four nineteen. Fifty-two miles south and just about a hundred east of here. Call it a hundred and ten sou'-sou'east from here on one long run. Thurlowe, we can make it by dawn. It's barely noon. You've got it straight, Ong Chuck?"

"Twenty-fi' ten, one hundled seventy-fo' nineteen," repeated the Chinaman. "I speak him too how many men? He say sixty thlee."

"Sixty-three! Three to one odds, practically. But we can handle it, eh, Thurlowe?" asked Boone. "How long will he sleep, Ong Chuck? No use taking him if he's so afraid."

"He sleep all same baby. Bimeby, long time, I think, maybe twenty-fo' hour he sleep. Velly ti'ed now. He all light."

"We'll leave him the grub and pick him up when we come back. Thurlowe! Otto!" He held out both his hands. "We're on the track at last, and, please God, we'll have Miss Newell out of it before we sleep."

"I like shake too," said Ong Chuck, and the four joined hands in the little crater beneath the blazing eye of noon.

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CHAPTER VI

THE BUCCANEERS

THE trade wind, that often at that season, when the northwest trades shift to the monsoon gales from the opposite direction, languishes at noon, blew true and strong. The *Roamer*, wing-and-wing, left a long trail of bubbling, sparkling foam behind her as she held straight course for Eremanga.

The heads of the expedition were assembled aft, watching the full-drawn sails, kept constantly wetted by the native sailors to get the full benefit of the breeze, speaking little, intent upon their own thoughts. Unafraid of the hazards of their quest, they reviewed its perils more clearly as they grew closer, with the quietness of men brave in the full consciousness of danger, intent upon playing their parts to the best davantage in the rescue of the girl and the avenging of their comrades.

The risk of a trap seemed imminent. That Sleeth would have an established lookout was only to be expected, and, with an arrival at dawn, discovery appeared certain. Yet in the face of all odds they must effect a landing, if possible, undetected. It was barely possible that the pirates, secure in their loneliness, might be lax in the matter of watchfulness, and this chance they hoped would break on their side.

No definite plans had been discussed before sighting Eremanga and Boone hoped to secure some definite information concerning its characteristics and the habits of Sleeth and his followers from Newell and Huddy, both of whom, under the ministrations of Campbell, were asleep. Huddy indeed seemed to have had his reason shaken by his sojourn on the ghostly crater of Matemotu. He had taken the opiate given him with the willingness of a good-natured child and would probably be lost to consciousness for many hours. But Newell, Campbell assured them, would probably awaken about sundown, or he could, if necessary, arouse him without risk.

The only present arrangements made were in the disposition of the landing-parties. Boone was to command the port whaleboat, taking with him Von der Mehden, Campbell, Haley and Ong Chuck. Thurlowe, with Sanders and Dixon, his own two mates, and the two supercargoes, the starboard boat. Four native boys were to row in each, leaving four to remain with the second mate of the *Roamer* on board the schooner in company with Newell and Huddy, both of whom were out of the reckoning as fighting-men.

The after-deck was turned into an impromptu armory with a litter of guns and ammunition that was being apportioned and overhauled. Von der Mehden was busy with batteries of dry cells, coils of fuse and insulated wire. A box marked "dynamite" was close to him, under a tarpaulin. The young German had great faith in being able to employ his explosives in some effective manner and blithely superintended the work of his assistant, Bockstatt; a German love-song on his lips, utterly unconscious of the incongruity of the air and words he hummed with the deadly intent of his work.

Ob ich dich liebe? Frage die Sterne,
Denen ich oft meine Klage vertraut;

"Cap those fuses, *landsmann!*"

Ob ich dich liebe? Frage die Rose,
Die ich dir sende, von Thränen bethaut.

Bockstatt, with grim dexterity, handled the fuses and arranged the wires, attaching them to the batteries.

"There," said Von der Mehden. "Mines we haf for land and water. And a couple of bombs to leave on the schooner. Drop those in their boats and *Guten Nacht!* There won't even be a splinter."

He laughed as he went to the rail. A great school of dolphins played on the quarter, swimming and leaping in a gay escort that was eagerly watched by the sailors as a certain harbinger of good luck.

The *Roamer* was making ten knots easily. The wind was due to lighten through the night and there was need of every mile they could cover while it held. By sunset the two skippers calculated they should have made between sixty and seventy miles, leaving about fifty for the dark hours. The risk of shoals had to be offset by the guard of constant soundings and the vigilance of all eyes and ears.

The essence of success was concentrated in getting under the lee of the island, on its south coast, before the light should uncover them and give the pirates too ample time for preparation of offense and defense. Occasionally, as the hours passed, one of

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the officers watched the course or hauled the patent log, reporting progress.

Ong Chuck served the sunset meal on deck. From a quietly deft, soft-footed, ever-smiling ship's cook, he had metamorphosed himself. His queue, which he maintained despite the mandate of his countrymen, was coiled tightly to his head, and about it he had wrapped a handkerchief of vivid yellow silk which seemed at once to transform his mild countenance to one of concentrated, if subdued, ferocity. His smile became a grin of menace, in harmony with the broad sash that held a curving, sheathless knife. Across his bare shoulder ran the strap of the holster of an automatic. His muscular body, smooth as ivory save for old cicatrices, showed yellow as old bone. Short, loose trousers ended at the knees. His feet were bare.

"If Sleeth sees you, Ong Chuck," commented Thurlowe, "he'll make you his first lieutenant."

"Suppose Sleeth, he see me, all ri', " answered the Chinaman. "Suppose I see Sam Clee?" He patted the blade of his long knife suggestively.

"What's your grudge against Sam Cree?"

"Long time ago he kill my blotheh," said Ong Chuck. "He catch um junk belong along my blotheh, all full-up sandalwood, in Little Colal Sea. My blotheh he fight. No good. Clee he take um sandalwood, put evellybody no dead in hold, shut um hatch, burn junk, burn evellybody."

"How did you find out about it, Ong Chuck?" asked Boone.

"I fin' out. One cousin of me he hide in wateh-ballel. Junk he plenty smoke, my cousin he jump ov'bo'd. Clee he no see. Bimeby, junk he bu'n to wateh-line, my cousin he climb back. Lain come. He get plenty dlink, not much eat. Bimeby canoe come. He save, my blotheh he burn. You likee tea, or Scotchysoda?"

Soon after sunset Campbell came on deck.

"Captain Newell asking to see you, Captain Boone. An' for the Lord's sake," went on the haggard medico, "some one talk to me an' keep on talkin'. Tak' it in turns. I'm nigh crazy wi' the abstinence."

THEY gathered around him as Boone went below. He found Newell awake in his bunk, fresh bandaged, his eyes—not so dark a gray as his daughter's, Boone noted—alert once more.

"Your Scotch friend patched me up, you see, Captain Boone," he said. "Though I'm afraid I won't mend soon enough to help you out much in the fighting end of it. Campbell has given me a hint of things," he went on. "What about my daughter?"

Boone told him, giving a swift review of the happenings since Marion Newell awoke in the night at Apia to find the message on the floor.

The wounded skipper sat upright amid his pillows, his thin hands clutching at the covers, his eyes ablaze.

"The scoundrels!" he cried. "And I'm lying here weaker than a child."

He sank back exhausted, unnerved and ashamed, the tears dripping between his bony fingers as he sobbed convulsively. Boone laid a hand on his shoulder. The sight of the brave mariner he had known, crying like a woman, brought home to him more clearly than ever the cruelty of Sleeth and Cree and the danger in which the girl was placed.

"That's why we're here, sir," he said.

Newell's hands dropped from his twitching face.

"You'll do your best, boy?"

"Surely, sir. For her sake as well as your own, Captain Newell."

"You're Boone's own boy, Dick," answered Newell, regaining self-control. "It's that dog Cree. I'd cheerfully give half of what life I have left to get a fair chance at him. And I had been congratulating myself on not letting Marion take the last trip with me.

"Campbell tells me you have got the position of this hidden island of Sleeth's from that poor wretch who was on Matemotu with Huddy and me. And only a scant hundred miles away. But you've got it. I tell you, lad, this is the time of Sleeth's reckoning. I feel it. He must be wiped out, he and Cree and all the piratical crowd of them—shown no mercy, given no quarter, hanged as high as Haman!"

His voice rose to a painful pitch and he fought for mastery of himself.

"Pretty much all in, Dick," he said presently in a more assured tone. "I haven't told you my end of the yarn yet. Sleeth on the *Ghost* cornered me between Phillip Island and Middleton Shoals—that's where my island lies. I must charter the *Roamer* to take me down there for a final clean-up, seeing I have no ship of my own. He's had

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me marked down as a prospect, of course, for a year or more, and this time he caught me in a dead calm. Came up on us out of a rain-squall that had passed by us breezeless and dry as a bone. Chugged up with that infernal engine of his to within half-cable's length, and started talking as if we had come together for an ordinary gam.

" 'Good morning, Captain Newell,' he said. 'It has taken some time to arrange this meeting, but here we are and I hope it proves profitable.'

"His decks were swarming with men, a mixed crew of proper villains, black, brown, yellow and white, pock-marked every mother's son of them. The whole gang had been swept by the scourge, it seems, though, if it was intended as a lesson, they failed to learn it.

" 'I'm coming aboard, Newell,' he said. 'See that all your papers are in order.' And grinned, as if he'd been a boarding-officer, damn him!

" 'I'll see you in blazes first,' I called back. Meanwhile Yates, my supercargo, was serving out arms as fast as he could. I'd always carried a few rifles for protection.

" 'It's possible, Newell,' Sleeth sang out. 'But I'm not going to be there myself for a while.' Some of his rascals stepped aside and there was Cree, grinning that split smile of his from behind the breech of a quick-firer.

"Stevens, my first mate, lost his head. Not that we could have put up much resistance against them, but I might have picked off Sleeth and maybe Cree with lucky shots. But Stevens was wild with rage. He'd been decoyed ashore and drugged and his arm broken at Noumea by Cree, the voyage before—but you know about that. Stevens took a shot at Cree with an automatic. Missed him.

"A volley came back before the flash faded, you might say. Stevens dropped; done for, a bullet clipped me across the side of my head, and, the next thing I knew, I was in a bunk aboard the *Ghost* with a groove in my head and a hole through the shoulder. What happened to Bostwick, my second, and Yates, I don't know. Sleeth burned the schooner. As for the native boys, one or two of them fell at the first shots and I suppose they joined Sleeth to save their hides. Only natural.

"They kept me without attention, without water to drink or for my wounds, while Sleeth tried to make me give up the position of my island. There are pearls enough in the lagoon to make it worth his while, but after my experience with Cree on my last trip, when he shipped as mate, I had kept no log, except from day to day, so I stood it for two or three days—I don't know how long it was—till I petered out. Then they fed me, and one day they bandaged me up and got the bullet out of my shoulder, and Sleeth came to my bunk, as sleek and contented as a cream-fed cat.

" 'You needn't overstrain your memory, Newell,' he said. 'I've arranged to get that position from Miss Newell.'

"I lay there and swore at him while he chuckled. He must have tortured it out of one of my poor fellows that I was going to meet Marion at Apia. Yates, likely enough, he was always a bit of a coward. Then he laid the plans you have told me of, which went through only too well. They were through with me. I don't see why they didn't make away with me, some scruple of Sleeth's about killing a brother skipper, perhaps. He's full of queer quirks. But they took me to Matemotu, hauled me up the cliff and left me there.

"If it hadn't been for Huddy, I'd have handed in my papers all right. I used to wish I could, lying in the cave, thinking of those devils setting a trap for my Marion. She's all I've got, Dick. If anything happens to her, it's the end of me. They let me write to her and I did, warning her not to tell in the hope I'd get clear. But no one ever got away from that crater unaided. I owe Louis something for that.

"It's pretty tough lying here, helpless, Dick, thinking of what those dogs may have done to Marion."

"I've been thinking of that too, sir," answered Boone, "and I figure it out pretty clearly that they haven't harmed her yet. In the first place, it doesn't look to me like a scheme of Sleeth at all. It was too risky. He'll disapprove. As long as she holds the secret of the pearls, the men are not going to have her mistreated, even by Cree. They'll want to be sure of their share and she's not the kind to weaken under fire. We have a day or so's leeway waiting for the answer to that cable she is supposed to have sent, you know."

"You're right there, Dick. That was a saving idea about the cable. It's the best hope. You must let me be on deck when you reach the island?"

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"Surely. That'll be tomorrow morning early. You'll be feeling fine after a night's rest. Can you tell me anything about the place?"

"Not much, but a little. I pretended to be worse than I was, lying in my bunk on the *Ghost*, and I overheard a few things that I pieced together. The island seems to have a double lagoon, joined by a creek that is navigable for the schooner only at high tide. There are natives, Papuans, who have been mistreated by Sleeth and his men until they are ready to rise. Sleeth is getting old and cranky. Has strange streaks of religion, if you can term it religion when it's quoted by that kind of a scoundrel. Cree aims to lead. The men are taking sides and discipline is slack. You may get in unseen after all. The camp is in the inner lagoon. There are about seventy of them, all told; about twenty, I think, are Kanakas.

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I think not, Dick. Unless that Chinaman of your's can get off these whiskers for me. I don't want Marion to see me like this."

"I'll send him in to you."

"Thanks. Then I'll try to get a little more sleep so as to be on hand tomorrow."

His eyes closed, and Boone left him, going on deck with the news he had gleaned. The wind still held fitfully and the luminous wake showed they were still making progress—though the canvas flapped idly at times—that should show the island close-to by the first light of dawn. Midnight came and the log registered ninety miles. Boone set double watches for signs of breakers and started the leadsmen to heaving at the bows. Every one on board was a volunteer lookout, every pulse on deck beat high beneath the stars as they drifted on through the night to Eremanga.

THE vague oscillation of the sky-curtain that invariably presaged the coming of the dawn found the *Roamer* slowly holding steerage-way, true to its course in the spasmodic breeze, over the long heave of the sleeping sea. It was still dark and the leadsmen continually cast and recast their twenty-fathom lines for unexpected shoals, though so far all precaution had proved unnecessary. There had been no sleep on deck. Eyes had strained through the veil of the darkness, watching for the loom of land or lights, ashore or afloat; and ears had strained for the sound of breaking water.

Ong Chuck, who had spent the night squatting on the cathead, suddenly raised his head, sniffed the breeze, sniffed again in the spells of calm, peered long across the starboard bow, then padded aft on naked feet to his skipper.

"I smellee land," he said, his nostrils dilating. "You come look see."

Boone followed him forward and turned his glasses in the direction of the Chinaman's pointing hand and arm. Beyond the jibs, to starboard, a little dead patch showed in the star-set sky, close to the horizon-line. As the *Roamer* rose to the lazy swell he caught it again.

He gave swift orders, the sheets came in, the *Roamer* heeled a little on it's new tack and headed up for the vague blot that meant Eremanga.

The dawn rushed swiftly up behind them as they neared the island, closehauled under its lee. Two peaks loomed high, the nearer, evidently of more recent upheaval, showing bare and blasted, rock-ribbed and forbidding, lower and of less extent than the farther, emerald with verdure, purple-valleyed, cleft like a bishop's miter. A few sea-birds wheeled in the sunrise, the surf drummed perpetually on the outer reef, but there was no challenge of shout or gun, the land seemed desolate.

"There's your notch," said Thurlowe to Boone, as the latter ordered the sheets eased, and the schooner, on her port tack, skirted the barrier reef. "Now for the palms."

A little promontory jutted from the land, set with pandañus, a straggling line of coconuts, and, in advance of the rest, three palms standing seaward like sentinels that gradually aligned themselves with the notch in the high peak. A gap showed in the spouting reef.

"How's the tide, Haley?" asked Boone.

"Running slack, sir."

"Head her up for the channel there. Haul in on your sheets. Smartly now. Take the wheel, will you Thurlowe, I'll con you in."

The crew jumped for the boomtackles and headsheets, the booms swung in, headsails flattened and the bowsprit pointed in line with the three palms and the cleft. Boone sprang to the foremast, and grasping the halyards footed swiftly up the rings to the

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spreader, scanning the entrance and giving an eye to the cliffs for some token of their having been observed.

"Channel's clear. Straight in to deep water," he called down to Thurlowe.

"No sign of trouble. Guess they're all asleep."

The schooner glided into the calm and limpid waters of the reef lagoon and headed slowly westward in the reflection of the volcanic cliffs, searching for the opening to the lagoon told of by the Other One in his hypnotic trance.

Passing a buttress of the sloping walls that towered high above the masts, a fissure opened up in the cliffs, stained red by the scanty soil through which protruded masses of somber lava. It grew wider and revealed the hollow interior of the mountain, lying dark and cool.

Boone announced a favorable channel, and standing up once more, the *Roamer* entered the water-basin of a flaring-lipped crater, the shell of a volcano, purple save where the mounting sun stained the western rim with a widening band of rose. The gentle lap-lap of the water at the stem was the only sound that broke the solitude. Almost opposite the entrance showed another gap where the crater walls had crumbled down. Mangroves grew rife in the bottom of the V, and above them gleamed the trees of the higher mountain.

Everywhere the cliffs rose sheer from the water save for a tiny beach at the gap, where a group of huts straddled on high stilts at the water's edge. The glass showed them abandoned, their thatched roofs destroyed by fire.

Within the bowl the wind failed utterly and the schooner drifted as the lead gave fifteen fathoms. Boone ordered the cable exchanged for a hawser to avoid the rattle of the chain, and the anchor was lowered without a splash into level water, blue as deepest cobalt, unflawed. The sails were handled with the same care and the schooner came to anchor as quietly as a floating swan.

"Well, here we are," said Boone. "Now for the next step. A landing-party, Thurlowe?"

"It's altogether too quiet to suit me," returned Thurlowe. "I don't like it. They probably feel tolerably secure, I don't suppose they've ever been disturbed, but I don't like it a little bit."

"That's the creek, by the mangroves, that ties up with the inner lagoon," said Boone. "I promised Newell I'd call him as soon as we made land. How about it, Campbell?"

"It'll be all richt," replied Campbell. "Huddy's still deid to the worl'. Newell's better on deck. I'll bring him up. He'll fret himsel' into a high fever below."

CHAPTER VII

EREMANGA

EREMANGA had the general shape of an hour-glass, with one bulb larger than the other. A creek, navigable at high tide for schooners, passable always for canoes and light-draft boats, connected the two craters, the one raw from the making, the other with it's scars covered with densely forested sides that sheltered the Papuan natives, who, driven from their beach-dwellings, were in rebellion against their enforced servitude with Sleeth.

Both basins were water-covered, the inner, about a mile in diameter, roughly circular, fed by streams and partly brackish. Its walls shelved less steeply, and, on the western side, dropped to a level crescent beach backed by a lava wall, at the base of which the bush grew rankly in the talus. On this shore were the tents and encampments of Sandalwood Sleeth & Co., buccaneers.

Smoldering fires sent up lazy volumes of smoke. About them a number of the pirates lay huddled. At either end of the beach two sleepy sentries sat, arms about their knees, rifles beside them, on guard against the Papuans.

The *Ghost*, gray-hulled, sails snugly furled, swung at anchor in mid-basin, a solitary figure patroling her decks. Her boats were hauled up on the sand at one horn of the crescent.

On top of the rock wall that backed the encampment another sentinel leaned upon his rifle and surveyed the sleeping camp. His call was answered by the watchers on the beach and taken up by yet another watchman, high on the rim where he could command the outer basin and the sea. Some of the sleepers stirred lazily, and, reassured by the hails, turned on their sides for another hour of sleep.

The man on the rim laid down his weapon and gazed anxiously into the seaward lagoon

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at the strange schooner riding there at anchor, as he had watched her make a confident entrance through the reef and find the channel to the outer basin. Now she rode short to her anchor, sails loosely furled, a whaleboat at the davits ready for launching; a brisk, noiseless bustle going on on deck.

Stunted, ill-nourished, a look of fear in his eyes as if in constant apprehension of a blow, the man glanced back irresolutely to the pirate stronghold. A second look at the *Roamer* seemed to strengthen his purpose. He stripped off his dingy shirt and scrambled painfully, barefoot, down the lava wall toward the abandoned huts, pausing frequently to wave his garment and to press his hand against his side, where a dark bruise showed plainly on his scrawny ribs.

"It's Boone's *Roamer*, sure enough," he muttered, flourishing his shirt. "They came in as if they knew the way. I wonder——"

He slipped and barely saved himself by clinging to the rough *tufa*.

On the *Roamer*, glasses were leveled on him as he toiled downward at evident risk of life and limb.

"That's a rum go," said Thurlowe. "He's trying to wigwag us all right, but the fool don't know any code. What d'ye make of it Boone? A trap?"

"It hardly seems so. More likely warning us, I should think. Wave back to him, Haley, it can't do any harm. Seems to me I've seen him before, without whiskers. Haven't you?"

"Let me take a look," asked Newell, lying on a mattress.

He propped himself on one elbow and took the glasses Boone offered him. He shifted the focus as he gazed, then handed them back.

"It's little Yates, my supercargo," he announced. "They must have pressed him. Get him aboard, Boone, he'll have news of my daughter. You can trust him. He's a coward, but he means well enough. Hurry, Boone, for God's sake, hurry man!"

The boat was already in the water. Boone and Thurlowe dropped into the stern.

"Von der Mehden, get Bockstatt and cover us with the second boat," shouted Boone. "Haley! Sanders! You go with them. On board there, stand by with your rifles. It may be some sort of a trap, after all."

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YATES, ex-supercargo of the *Pleiades*, had reached the abandoned huts and stood at the edge of the water, beckoning. The first boat grounded and the two skippers sprang ashore. The covering boat hovered close by, ready to attack at the first sign of treachery. But no other figure appeared on shore or cliff.

"Yates, isn't it?" asked Boone. "I'm Captain Boone of the *Roamer* there, Captain Newell's aboard."

"Ah!" answered the trembling Yates. "I thought it was the *Roamer*. I know you sir, and Captain Thurlowe too, by sight. Is Captain Newell all right?"

"Yes. Pull yourself together man. Get in the boat."

"I can't. I've got to get back. I'm the sea-sentry. I have to call down to the cliff-man every hour. If they miss me, they'll be down on us. Have you got a drink? I'm all to pieces."

Boone produced a flask of whisky from the boat-locker and Yates held it to his chattering teeth.

"Brace yourself, man," said Boone sternly. "How's Miss Newell. Is she here?"

The man stared at him.

"She's here, and safe so far," he said. "I don't know how you got here, but thank God you did. They're asleep in there," he jerked a wavering chin toward the creek, all except the sentries. Hell's just ready to pop. Sleeth's acting like he was dippy of late an' Cree's workin' up a mutiny. Some of us will join you. Men who've been captured an' held like I was. We've no shares an' they treat us like a lot of niggers. Cruel. Nearly kicked my ribs in two days ago.

"Cree's just waiting to start his ructions when the *Crest of the Wave* gets back from Suva. They've sent her there with a note from Miss Newell to get a cable she's expecting. She sailed yesterday. Capwell, her regular captain, didn't go. He's crazy about Miss Newell. So's Cree. But Capwell swears he'll protect her. He's the first man Cree'll attend to if he wins out. But he hasn't done it yet. Sleeth's a wise one. Miss Newell's in a little cabin above the camp.

"She's safe for a bit. You see Sleeth's got most of the loot hidden somewhere, even Cree don't know where. That's holding the men back. The natives here have all quit. Cree used to flay 'em alive an' they've gone off an' hidden in the woods. They've got no guns and Sleeth burned all their canoes an' fired the huts. They can't get by us back of the camp, but they wait each side of the creek daytimes and the boats can't get out 'count of the rocks they throw down. They broke the foregaff of the *Crest* yesterday. Funny you didn't see her. But she sailed due north, of course, an' you come up to south'ard. I've got to go, they'll be missin' me."

"Wait a moment," said Boone. "How many are there in the gang?"

"Sleeth killed a man yesterday for swearin' at him. He's goin' dippy, I tell you. That leaves fifty-five, counting out my crowd. Besides the women, an' they're a tough lot."

"Who follows you as sentry?"

"Emory. He's one of my crowd. Used to be mate with Barkhausen. They don't trust us, but they make us take the outer watch. They'd kill us if we didn't report. But we'll take our chances with you."

"You'd better," said Thurlowe emphatically.

"We'll stick. I've got to get back though." He shivered apprehensively.

"Take this with you." Boone handed him the flask. "Get back to your post and warn Emory when he relieves you. Any danger of any one else seeing us?"

"No. They gamble all day when they ain't plotting or sleepin'. No one's ever come here before. An' they're too scared of the natives to tackle the creek daytimes, except in the schooner."

"When it's dark," went on Boone, "you and the rest you can trust—make sure of them, you're between two fires—come down to the creek. We'll be there. Can you get away safely?"

"We'll meet you at the bend."

"Can you get a message to Miss Newell?"

"I take her food to her."

"Then get word to her her father's here—with me—and to look out after dark for a rescue. Get back now and brace up, or you'll give us away."

"I've lost my nerve," whimpered Yates. "They've treated us cruel. But we'll be careful."

He started up the cliff as the boat backed off to join the other, both returning to the schooner.

"I'd like to take a look at the entrance, Dick," said Von der Mehden. "It's narrow, and Bockstatt agrees that we could put in

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some sticks of dynamite with a long fuse or a battery and choke it. Bottle them up, you know, if we haf to, in no time."

"All right, Otto. Go to it," said Boone. "But make as little noise as you can."

ARMED with explosives and batteries, Vond der Mehden went happily off with Bockstatt in the boat, joyful as a schoolboy about to tackle a wasps' nest. On board there was an eager discussion of the news Yates had brought. Captain Newell seemed to take on new strength and hope as he listened.

"Miss Newell's the first consideration, of course," said Boone. "I propose to reconnoiter after dark, with a view to getting her away without a general fight. It looks to me as if we might be able to."

"I hate to leave without one good try to clean out those pirates," said Thurlowe. "And there are the pearls. If we could surprise them from the cliffs we could come close to wiping them out. That may sound like a massacre, but I don't feel squirmy about it, when I look at Huddy and Newell here an' remember the others left to die on Matemotu."

"There are the natives," said Boone. "We don't want to overlook them. They are liable to be against any white man."

"Once get my girl aboard," said Newell, "and then tackle the crowd. Marion will be as strong on that point as any of you. As for the pearls, I can afford to lose what they took from me, but Huddy's lost everything and there are the widows of the skippers we know have passed out at the hands of Sleeth and his murderers. Flood's somewhere about dawn or a little later, you say, Boone. They can't bring out the *Ghost* till then. We go in with a clear retreat.

"If Von der Mehden can blow up that channel, we've all the best of it, even if we don't get away till after the flood is full. Get me my girl and then clean them up. If I could only stand on my feet for more than five consecutive minutes I'd be with you."

"That suits me," said Boone. "It's agreed we'll try for Miss Newell first, without arousing the camp, if possible. With her aboard, we'll tackle them at dawn, attacking from the cliffs and the cover of the mangroves. It isn't flood till two hours after dawn and, if they try to get their boats down the creek, I've got a plan to block the channel with one of Ong Chuck's Chinese pirate stunts. As for the natives, we'll have to take a chance on them. They haven't got any firearms, anyway. So as soon as it's well dark we'll be off for Miss Newell."

Boone set the native boys to work making a score or so of stakes about fifteen feet in length, using the piles and timbers of the huts. These were hewn at both ends to sharp points.

But for the risk of discovery from smoke, these would have been hardened in the fire, but, for the short use for which they were needed, Ong Chuck, superintending their manufacture, deemed them satisfactory. They were to be driven, later, under cover of darkness, into the soft bed of the creek at a sharp angle to cover their own retreat, if necessary, or serve as a barrier for any exit Sleeth might attempt, a formidable obstacle for oncoming boats propelled swiftly or a schooner gliding on a flood tide.

Toward the end of the afternoon Von der Mehden and Bockstatt returned triumphantly from the reef, where they had worked valiantly, drilling holes below and above watermark, wiring and assembling the capped sticks of dynamite.

"You leaf me on der rock," said Bockstatt. "Ven der schooner gome! So!" He pressed an imaginary button with a vigorous thumb. "Pouff!" And he tossed his fingers upward in a crumpled heap and smoothed the air with his palm in a comprehensive gesture.

Despite the work and the spur of the fear of momentary discovery, the hours dragged. Twice the alarm was given, as glimpses were caught of figures high on the cliffs, but as nothing came of these discoveries they determined that the observers must have been some of the rebellious natives who were powerless to attack them in their present position.

At eight bells, as soon as Von der Mehden returned, Boone took advantage of the ebb and had the *Roamer* towed through the crater channel, with it's mines, to the reef lagoon, anchoring by the little promontory of the palms. There had been little or no wind all day and the barometer steadily dropped with a pumping action that was ominous. The trade-clouds were scattered in broken masses and the sea beyond the reef heaved sluggishly, dull of hue, unglazed.

The sun went down in a clear sky of

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tawny orange, blending into vivid green and so to the deep blue, almost violet, of the zenith. The three captains consulted over the weather signs.

"Looks like a three-days' calm to me," said Newell, and Thurlowe nodded his acquiescence. "This time of year's ripe for it. Then we'll get a gale from the south'ard and the monsoon season will be on."

"It'll blow in the right direction for us going back, anyway," said Von der Mehden cheerfully.

He was armed to the teeth with rifle, bandolier, two automatics and a hunting-knife, almost as spectacularly as Ong Chuck, and constantly humming his German love-ballad.

Ob ich dich liebe? Frage die Wolken,
Denen ich oft meine Botschaft vertraut;
Ob ich dich liebe? Frage die Wellen,
Ich habe in jeder dein Bildnis geschaut.

"We're not going to get any good out of a calm," said Boone, "with Sleeth able to turn over his engine in the *Ghost* any time he wants to come out. A calm is the last thing we're looking for. But we can't change the weather."

"Much good their engine will do them when I press my little button on the reef," said Von der Mehden. "I only hope they come out after all the hard work Bockstatt and I haf done."

WELL after dark the second mate and supercargo of the *Roamer*, much to their disgust, were left aboard with two of the native sailors and Newell and Huddy. The latter had frankly volunteered to stay with his wounded comrade.

"I'm too jumpy for much good," he said. "I'd fight in a corner, but they've got my goat for the time being. If anything is doing 'round here we can't handle, I'll send up a couple of rockets. Maybe you'll see them. But there's not much risk here."

The two boats started as appointed, Boone in charge of one, Thurlowe of the other. Skirting the cliff they entered the outer crater once more, a bowl of ebony cliffs and inky waters, waveless, reflecting the stars that blazed above the mouth of the great funnel, so that the boats seemed afloat in the heavens making their way between the planets.

With muffled thole-pins they rowed silently across the pool and reached the mangrove-guarded creek. The natives shifted their oars, using them as paddles dipping them silently into the velvet water, feeling their way through the narrow channel, guided by the opening where the fringing mangroves showed a strip of glittering sky.

No alarm came from the tangle of boughs and roots deep-set in the water, though the maze seemed an ideal hiding-place for lurking savages, armed with poisoned spears and arrows. Boone held a theory that the Papuans might have sensed that the arrival of the schooner boded no good to Sleeth and were waiting to see how events would aid their own reprisal.

They paddled for a long half mile to where the creek curved. Beyond the bend they saw the slopes of the inner crater opening up. The native boys climbed noiselessly overboard, knee deep in the water, and set the sharp stakes in a slanting palisade across the channel, the points out of water, hidden in the darkness until the rising tide should finally submerge them.

The work was done silently, the stalwart natives driving the stakes deep into the sandy bottom of the creek by sheer weight. As the last spear was being placed, a low hail came from the bank, followed by the whisper:

"This is Yates."

The matted roots of the mangroves formed a crude overwater trail and on it crouched six men, revealed by a swift flash of an electric torch. The two boats were moored to the tree-roots and all listened eagerly to the supercargo's report.

"There's a big palaver going on tonight, later," he said. "Cree and his crowd have been drinking all day and they're ripe for a row. That gave us our chance and we got away without being seen."

"Did you get a message to Miss Newell?"

"Yes. She ain't had much use for me. Seemed to think that I went back on the skipper, though I thought he was dead and only tried to save my own life. But I wrote two names on a slip of paper and hid it between two biscuits—Newell and Boone, I wrote, and when I went back for the dishes she crooks her eyebrows and I nods.

"Capwell was hanging around an' I couldn't say a word. As soon as supper was over, Cree an' his bunch starts to hittin' the booze again an' I gets our crowd together an' we sneaks. I tell you we was scared pink of some of them Kanakas spittin' us with a spear in the dark, but it ain't

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far. You can see the fires from just round that bend. Listen!"

The sound of a chorus came clearly through the still night, then the tones of a rollicking baritone voice in the solo. The words sounded plainly.

A skull is the cup that tastes the best,
Ho for the red, red wine!
Swallow the draft with an idle jest,
The next turn may be thine, be thine,
The next turn may be thine.

Then the chorus again trolled in unison, women's voices shrilling above the deep notes of the buccaneers.

Over the seas with a quickening breeze;
Ho for the life of a rover!
At the point of a knife we fashion our life,
Ever the wide world over.
Though we die in our shoes with our neck in a noose,
We've only ourselves to blame.
So a fig for the priest and the black crow's feast.
Die game, my lads, die game, die game,
Die game, my lads, die game!

"That's Black George singing," said Yates. "He's a Britisher and a bad one. Listen to the women."

A burst of high-keyed voices repeated the final line.

Die game, my lads, die game.

"They're the worst—the women," said Yates, shivering. "They tortured me, they did, —— them."

"Did you tell Sleeth about Miss Newell waiting at Apia?" asked Boone sternly.

"I couldn't help it, could I?" he whimpered. "So help me, you'd have told. Had me swinging down, head first, over a slow fire. They'd have cooked me. Cree's woman was running it. It was in the galley of the *Pleiades*. They told me Captain Newell was dead an' they wasn't goin' to harm the girl."

"So Sleeth was in on that scheme, after all," said Boone. "Do they carry their women to sea with them?"

"It's against orders, but Cree does. She's a devil. Jude Demoulins. She's crazy jealous of Miss Newell an' she's threatened to knife Cree more'n once. He beat her up this afternoon, but she'll turn a blade in his ribs yet."

There was a grunt in the darkness from Ong Chuck.

"Can you guide us to the cabin where Miss Newell is, without our being seen, Yates?" asked Boone.

"After a bit. We can't pass Cree's gang yet. They're close to the trail. They'll go over to the other fire for a talk with Sleeth, presently. Then we can slip up."

"What about sentries?"

"I'm supposed to be one of them an' Olsen here the other. But they won't be watching out for us tonight. There's too much doing."

"The less go on this trip the better," said Boone. "I'll go ahead with Yates. If you don't hear from me in, say, half-an-hour, Thurlowe, come after me with one of the men to show you the way. We don't want to risk any open fighting till we get Miss Newell safe. Come on Yates."

THE two disappeared, creeping noiselessly over the interlacing boughs. There was a little stir in the dark and Thurlowe turned to miss Ong Chuck, who had followed his skipper into the darkness.

Boone and Yates followed the creek to where it widened into the deeper waters of the inner basin, and, with bodies bent, stole into the jungle growing densely at the foot of the cliff that skirted Sleeth's encampment. Close to the foot of an upward trail it thinned out and there they halted in the pandanus where the shadows danced by the light of the fire, about which were gathered Cree and his followers, chanting their ribald songs.

A keg of liquor was tended by several women, dressed in tawdry finery, who, as they replenished the cups and mugs, tossed the heeltaps on the fire where they sent up little bursts of blue flame.

They were a rough lot, these latter-day buccaneers, who, in childish love of display, had evidently modeled their garb in emulation of earlier sea-rovers. But for their more modern weapons, they might have been a band of Morgan's or Bluebeard's desperadoes, come back from Gehenna to sport about an earthly, cooler fire. Bright bandannas bound their heads, earrings showed amid the shaggy locks, vivid sashes beneath leather belts holding up-to-date clips and cartridges. Most of them were bare-legged and footed in the soft sand.

They seemed of all nationalities, to judge from their jumbled accents, though sun and wind had tanned them to a universal swarthiness. Beards and mustaches were plentiful, with here and there an evident

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dandy. Cheeks glowed deeply red and eyes glistened in the glow of the fire while the two secure in the shadows crouched and listened.

The song ended and Cree, his puckered eye and awry smile plain to see, arose to his feet, swaying a little as he stood, though the liquor he had taken seemed to have rather inflamed than mastered him.

"Mates," he cried, while a shout of approval greeted him. "We'll hav' the confab with Meester Sleeth. He's bin a hog too long. He'll make good bacon. Listen—" his raised hands checked the laughter and cheering— "we mak' heem giv' up da loot you work for. Share an' share alike say I. Me—I giv' you my share. I tak' da girl. Vat you say?"

The circle broke into applause of hands and voice, a mêlée of fierce gesticulation and rapid talk. Boone clinched his fists to resist the impulse that prompted him to shoot Cree where he stood.

Yates laid a hand on his arm.

"Look," he whispered, his mouth close to Boone's ear. "To the right."

The face of a woman, handsome in it's Gipsy type, the black hair, blended with the shadows, framing the strained features, showed plain in the ruddy firelight, peering from the pandanus, a scant dozen paces away. There was a bruise on one cheek, the eyes shone crimson like a beast's, one could imagine the figure poised for a spring. All the attention of the woman was riveted on Cree with an intense vindictiveness.

"Jude Demoulins," whispered Yates.

Boone could feel him shake with fear.

As he spoke the face disappeared, dragged back forcibly. There was a swiftly choked cry, the rustle of stiff leaves, lost in the crackle of the leaping fire and the sound of the voices about it.

"P'st!" sounded from the bush, followed by a low, crisp whisper in Ong Chuck's voice.

"You come here, Cap'n."

Boone crept across, snakewise, on his stomach.

The woman lay on the ground, pinned down by the Chinaman, one strong hand across her mouth. The other crept back and the blade of Ong Chuck's knife flashed as he pressed it's keen steel to her throat.

"You cly, me cut," he said, and removed his hand cautiously from her mouth.

She lay without resistance or outcry, panting.

"Who are you?" she asked in a low whisper.

"I've come after Miss Newell," answered Boone. "What shall we do with her, Ong Chuck?"

"Better me kill, I think."

"You are a pair of fools," said the woman. "Lie close."

THERE was a movement around the fire, and the pirates, kicking the keg into the flames, trooped off to the other end of the beach where the remainder of the crew was gathered about another blaze.

"You want the girl?" asked the woman, as the two groups mingled. "You shall have her. You are her lover? If you want her, you are welcome to her, the pale, cold thing. I could choke the life out of her with one hand—the weakling! I would have before morning if you hadn't come. Now I shall kill Cree instead. Take away that knife, you fool."

"Better you leave Clee alone," said Ong Chuck. "Me fix Clee."

"He'll drive you into the sea, you fools," she answered. "Take the girl and go."

"You must come with us to the cabin," said Boone. "We know where it is. No treachery, mind."

"She cly, I fix," said Ong Chuck grimly.

"I'll do better than that," said Jude Demoulins. "Capwell's on guard. He's your rival—" she laughed softly—"I'll get his attention while you kill him. He's no loss, the soft-hearted fool. Come, while Cree settles with that doddering Sleeth."

Boone called to Yates, and getting no answer crept back to where he had left him. There was no trace of the man.

"Lost his nerve again," commented Boone. "Come on."

They moved through the bush toward the trail. Ong Chuck had bound the woman's wrists with the kerchief from her neck. She led, followed by the Chinaman. Now and then he pricked her neck with his knife-blade.

"Bette' you lemember," he muttered. "No make cly. Sabby?"

They reached the summit of the cliff and looked down upon the beach. Both fires still burned brightly, though the deserted one was dying down. Voices came faintly

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to them of two men in dispute, the first Cree's, the other a deeper rumble.

"That's Sleeth," said Jude Demoulins. "He loses his last game tonight. Quietly now, there should be a sentry at the turn."

"If it's Yates, you won't find him," said Boone.

"Turned traitor, the sniveling coward? I pity him if Sleeth catches him. I smoked him once. Next time the fire will be hotter."

"Use your tongue when I ask you," said Boone sternly.

The woman laughed.

"There's your sweetheart," she said. "Better take the upper trail."

A light showed ahead from a little window. A passing shadow extinguished it for an instant, then it shone down the trail once more.

"Capwell's there," said the woman.

She led the way, climbing nimbly despite her fettered hands. Presently they were standing on a wide ledge twenty feet above the lower trail where the cabin closed the path, it's outline vaguely visible in the starlight. Before it paced Capwell. The glint of a rifle barrel twinkled dully from his shoulder.

Boone heard the thumping of his heart as he knelt on the ledge, watching the sentinel parading in front of the lighted window behind which the girl was watching, waiting for some sign of rescue. He knew in that moment, the supreme one of the quest as far as he was concerned, with Marion almost within reach, within sound of his voice should he choose to raise it, that the pulsing beat within him was not merely the excitement of the issue close at hand, but akin to the mysterious thrill the mere thought of her never failed to bring, an alarm drum-call to love and arms.

Capwell stopped and listened to a shout from below, then strolled a short way down the path to where he could overlook the encampment.

"Will you trust me to go down and hold him in talk?" whispered Jude Demoulins.

"No," answered Boone curtly. "Stay where you are."

She turned her head toward him.

"Eh, but you are young," she said. "You know little of women. Have it your own way. Here he comes back again. I'll call him from here. Are you ready?"

Boone crouched, his thighs tense beneath him, as the unconscious Capwell returned. He had no wish to kill the man, who, however crude his chivalry, had at least aided in the protection of Marion. He came directly beneath them and the woman called to him.

"Hist! Capwell!"

"Who's that?" he cried, wheeling swiftly to face the cliff, his face upturned, his rifle ready.

"It's Jude, you fool," she answered. "Lower your gun."

He dropped the muzzle and Boone hurtled down upon him from the ledge, striking him full on his chest, bearing him violently to the ground. The man's head thumped on the hard rock and rolled limp from the neck.

"Want me?" called Ong Chuck softly.

"No," answered Boone, trussing and gagging the unconscious Capwell with his own headgear and sash. "Keep your eye on the woman."

He ran to the window, unglazed, rudely barred with wood. A face was already there, pressing close to his.

"Marion!" he cried.

"Dick!"

The door was fastened with a heavy beam, stapled into the frame. He tossed it aside and stood on the threshold.

"Come," he said.

Pale, her gray eyes larger than ever in their shadows, her hair pale gold in the light of the lantern on the wall, she came swiftly toward him.

"I knew you'd come," she said. "Where is dad?"

THEY left Capwell, bound and gagged, lying in the hut, the door barred upon him, and stepped swiftly down the trail. Ong Chuck and Jude Demoulins joined them where the paths met.

Cree's mistress laughed sneeringly as she saw Marion.

"Well, pigeon," she said. "Your mate has found you. Thanks to me, do you hear? Thanks to me."

Marion Newell looked at her quietly, without shrinking from her fierceness.

"Do you know what would have happened to that slim throat of yours tonight if he had not come?" went on the woman. "Do you know what would have happened to those lips he cherishes and that I hate? I would have sliced——"

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She stifled a shriek as Ong Chuck sunk half an inch of his blade between her shoulders. Boone, his face burning, stood itching with desire to strike the furious mouth. To hear himself styled as Marion's lover, as the rightful possessor of her lips, must, he felt, raise a barrier between him and the sensitive girl.

"Keep silence, you," he said fiercely. "Let us go to your father, Miss Marion. He is waiting for you."

"He is well?"

"He will be when he sees you. Can you walk all right? I don't want to use the torch."

"Oh yes," she answered. "Let us hurry."

Ong Chuck, ahead with Jude Demoulins, laid one menacing hand on the woman's shoulder and held up the other warningly. The noises from the beach had died away, but there were footsteps on the path close by, a bold voice singing:

Red are the lips that wait for me,
Ho for the blood that flows!
Eager for lovetime's revelry,
Ho for her bosom's snows!
Ho for her bosom's snows!

Over the seas with a quickening breeze,
Ho for the life of a rover!
At the point of a knife we fashion our life
Ever the wide seas over.
Though we die in our shoes—

The song broke off.

"Capwell, you slinking dog," cried the singer. "That's you. Goin' to die in your shoes. Ri' now. Come on, you cur. Come out the shadow."

Red are the lips that wait for me—

Cree lurched around the shoulder of the cliff. Jude Demoulins uttered an involuntary cry. Cree flattened against the wall and a bullet sang by Boone's ear as he thrust Marion behind him.

"That you, Capwell?" cried the pirate. "Eh? Why don't you fight back?"

Boone flashed his powerful torch full in Cree's face, dazzling him, while he felt for his automatic. The face in the glare was a-snarl with drunken passion and ferocity, the crooked lips drawn back, the eyes, maimed and dree, glaring through slitted lids. Jude Demoulins flung herself, bound as she was, upon Boone, biting, kicking, in a frenzy of revulsion as she shouted a warning to her lover.

"You shall not kill him," she panted. "I love him. Do you hear? I love him."

Boone glimpsed Ong Chuck darting through the ray of the torch toward Cree as he struggled with the desperate woman. The Chinaman and the pirate swayed on the narrow path. Ong Chuck's hand closed on the wrist that held the pistol, there was the flash of a knife, a groan, and the two fell.

In a moment Ong Chuck rose, wiping his blade on his sash. Jude Demoulins flung herself on the prostrate form.

"He kill my blotheth, I kill him," said Ong Chuck. "I gut him all same fish. Betteh we hully."

Leaving the woman with her dead lover, they ran down the trail. The shot seemed to have passed unnoticed and they reached the bush at the foot of the cliff in safety and hurried on toward the creek.

Suddenly shriek after shriek sounded behind them. Looking over their shoulders they saw Jude Demoulins rush past the dying fire at the end of the trail, her dress sopped with Cree's blood, her hair streaming behind her.

Boone took Marion's hand and guided her across the treacherous pathway of tangled mangrove boughs, using his torch freely to blaze the way. Shouts came from behind, dying away, to their astonishment, until Boone sensed the reason.

"They've gone for their boats," he said. "We're nearly there now."

There were more shouts, this time ahead, and the beam showed Von der Mehden pistol in hand, Thurlowe and the rest close behind.

"Back to the boats!" shouted Boone. "They're after us!"

As they cleared their moorings the sound of oars in swift stroke came down the creek. They paddled swiftly to the bend and waited.

Splashes of light showed on the twisted trees and in the water, thrown from burning palm torches as two boats crowded with men, the red glare reflecting from their weapons, came surging down the stream. At the curve the creek widened and they drew abreast with wild halloos. The flaring brands gave little light ahead and they were upon the stakes without a hint of their presence before the crash of impact.

Both boats struck at almost the same time. The rowers fell back on their fellows amid curses and utter confusion as the

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water poured in through the shattered planks. From Boone's and Thurlowe's boats came a constant volley as the men emptied their repeaters into the struggling mass. The pirates sprang over their thwarts into the water and made for the shore as best they could, firing scattered shots that went wild and high.

"Back to the schooner," shouted Boone. "Row, don't paddle."

His boat led the way, Marion in the stern. The shouting buccaneers were soon left behind and they shot out into the outer crater, beneath the quiet stars, pulling lustily for the entrance.

"Man dear, yon was a gra' trick," said Campbell. "Ye staked them like we did the English at Bannockburn. It was gran', but we had to leave just as it was gettin' to be interestin'."

Lights showed on the *Roamer* in response to their shouts. The side-ladder had been rigged and Captain Newell, supported by Huddy, stood at the rail. The bandage on his head had been replaced by plasters and he carried his wounded arm in a sling.

"Is she safe?" he cried. "Did you get her, Boone?"

"I'm here, Daddy," answered Marion, and the next instant she was against his breast.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAYING OF THE GHOST

THERE was a midnight council aboard the *Roamer*. Marion Newell was below with her father, the native sailors were clustered forward seeking the sleep their masters still denied themselves in the excitement of the quest, and the five men from Sleeth's marauding company who had come in with the still missing Yates were grouped by themselves amidships, uneasily conscious of the fact that, as renegades, they had yet to prove themselves before they were again admitted to equal rights and rank with honest men.

Though the first part of the expedition was successfully brought to an issue with the rescue of Captain Newell and his daughter, with the finding of Huddy and the death of Cree for extra measure of satisfaction, the clash with the buccaneers had warmed the blood of the adventurers aboard the *Roamer* beyond any consideration of the affair as closed.

Boone felt his own instincts at war within, the wish to see the girl in absolute safety combating with the intense desire to clear the seas of every remnant of the buccaneers, and, at the same time, to recover all that was left of the treasure they had wrested from Newell and Huddy and the dead captains, lying huddled in the cave on lonely Matemotu.

"What do you think of the situation, Thurlowe?" Boone asked, as they sat with pipes and cigars aglow on the after deck. "Are we right in exposing Miss Newell to any further risks? Now that we know Sleeth's headquarters it would be an easy matter to hold him here, for a while at least, by exploding Von der Mehden's mine, long enough to see Miss Newell safely to Suva and call on Government House for help to capture the gang without further bloodshed. The sight of a gunboat and a well-aimed shell or two would soon bring them to terms."

"Well," answered Thurlowe, tugging at his beard, "that sounds like sensible advice, though I doubt if it comes from your heart, Boone. Of course the main idea of the trip was the rescue of Newell an' his daughter. That's done. But I hate to leave a job unfinished once it's well started. Here's Huddy plumb busted, and there's the fam'lies of Wahlgren, Barkhausen, Gregg, and the rest, sheer up against it for somethin' to eat, for all we know.

"You know what'll happen by the time Government House gets to workin' an' starts a gunboat down this way. Sleeth'll have vamosed, an' the loot, you can lay your bottom dollar, will be tucked away somewhere even tighter and safer than it is now. No, sir, I for one want to see justice handed out full-peppered to that nest of robbers, but I for one want to have a hand in it. An' if ye want to get back what they've stolen there'll have to be harder persuasion put to Sleeth than the methods of a British board of inquiry."

"Man dear," broke in Campbell, as Thurlowe stopped talking. "If ye turn back to Suva wi'oot anither crack at yon pirates, ye'll be takin' me back a corp. I've foresworn liquor till we feenish the job, an' let me tell ye purely fra' a pheesician's stan'-point, that a man canna rin his internal economy on alcohol as long as I have an' shift to a change o' fuel wi'oot a breakdown.

"Ye can't rin a gas-engine on coal-oil

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wi'oot a new style o' carbureeter. Cree's dead, the rest o' the de'ils must be in a gey turmoil. We've gi'en them ane lesson, an' ye'll surely no be closin' the school yet. Ye promised me a bonny fecht, Captain. I've done naught but pu' the trigger a time or so, an' I'm no certain I did much damage at that."

He spoke lightly, but there was a wire edge to his voice that told of the genuine strain upon his vitality. His words brought a murmured echo of agreement from the rest.

"I potted two that I know of," said Von der Mehden. "I'm not over bloodthirsty, Dick, but *Donnerwetter!* this is no time to stop."

"As a matter of fact," said Boone, "I think the matter's settled for us by the weather. The barometer's still pumping for a change, but there'll be little wind if any before morning. Captain Newell spoke of a three-days' calm, Thurlowe. What do you think of the prospects now? Did you notice the phosphorescence as we came back?"

"Yes. Newell was speakin' of average conditions, which generally mean three days of dead calm at the monsoon change, but I'm inclined to agree with you that there'll be something doin' inside of twenty-four hours at the most."

"But at present we're due to stay here a while," said Boone. "So that ends it, and I'll confess it suits my mood. After all, I entered on this trip and asked you to join me at the instigation of Miss Newell. She is the real leader of the expedition."

"Then if that is the case, Captain Boone," said a clear voice, "the leader commands you to go ahead."

MARION NEWELL had come quietly into the midst of them and stood, one little fist clenched tight at her side, the other resting on the companionway, her head thrown back, her eyes flashing in the starlight—the personification of pluck and determination.

"Bravo!" cried Campbell, and a spontaneous cheer broke from the circle.

"I came on deck to thank you, Captain Boone," she said, "and all the rest of you gentlemen for your bravery and your—gallantry. We, my father and I, don't know how to thank you, though we shall try to find some way. But on one thing we are assured. Indeed my father had asked me to deliver this message—to go ahead. Don't stop to think there's a girl aboard, please," she pleaded. "Think I'm a boy, as indeed I wish I were just now, and, if you'll give me a gun, I can at least try to use it."

The little speech brought more cheers, under cover of which the girl retreated to the cabin.

"That does settle it," said Boone. "If we can reflect some of the spirit Miss Newell shows when we tackle the job, I'm sorry for Sleeth. Now let's see where we stand. To start with, we've lost any advantage of surprising them. On the other hand, they've lost their boats. We're becalmed at least until morning, there's not the whisper of a breeze, but—" he held up a wetted forefinger —"they've got an engine in the *Ghost.* They can come out when they want to. We can go in, in boats, so long as the channel is open.

"Cree's dead, probably one or two more are accounted for in the scrap we had there in the creek. If Von der Mehden thinks he hit any one he probably did. We're eighteen whites with our new recruits—" he lowered his voice—"and I don't count heavily on them. Their nerve has been pretty well smashed. But call us eighteen, with eight natives and Ong Chuck, making twenty-seven in all. That's only two to one for odds. We can get away with that.

"Here's what I propose. At dawn, unless I miss my guess, when Sleeth sees us becalmed here in the lagoon at sun-up, he'll think us easy picking and bring out the *Ghost.* He can't get through the creek till full flood. That's somewhere about an hour after dawn. When he gets to the channel——"

"Pouf!" cried Bockstatt.

"We don't want to set off the mine unless we are sure he is coming through. We want to leave entrance in case we have to carry the fight to him. And we don't want to blow the *Ghost* up either, Bockstatt, just to put the cork in the bottle. Then we can talk terms to them."

"What terms?" asked Thurlowe. "You don't propose to load fifty odd prisoners, not to mention their women, aboard the *Roamer* and guard them all the way back to Suva! There isn't room in the first place."

"It could be done, I think," answered

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Boone. "But my idea was to land them all except Sleeth on Matemotu, and leave them there until the authorities took hold and sent for them."

"All of which is hatching your chickens before they are counted, *nein?*" put in Von der Mehden. "So! Put me ashore on the cliff with Bockstatt by our mines and I will close the door of your chicken-coop, so that you can count them at ease."

"In the meanwhile," said Boone, "we had better get what sleep we can. An hour or so will freshen all of us. Dawn is a little before five; high-tide about an hour later. We should start at eight bells, so as to take up positions before it gets light enough for any of Sleeth's lookouts to see us. Otto, are both sides of the entrance mined?"

"*Ja.* The wires lead to a ledge on the port side going in, where you can leave Bockstatt and me safely. We can peep over the edge of the cliff easily. On the other side of the channel there are caves big enough to hold your boats at high water, and there are ridges too, where you can climb and watch, and, if necessary, shoot from and be protected."

"Fine! Ong Chuck! Hot coffee and grub at eight bells sharp! Thurlowe, just a minute before you turn in."

The two skippers went to the after rail together, as the rest of the adventurers made themselves comfortable for three hours of much needed sleep.

"This is likely to be desperate business, Thurlowe," said the younger man. "If I am dropped and it looks as if it might go against us, you will take command, of course, and look out for Miss Newell's safety. I'm going to leave your mate Sanders aboard the *Roamer*. I know you consider him reliable.

"About the five men who joined us. They've proven themselves weak brethren once, and if things seemed to turn in favor of Sleeth they are liable to switch again. I don't fancy leaving them on the schooner with Miss Marion. Suppose you take two along in your boat to row, and I'll take the other three. At least we'll have them under our own eyes."

"Good idea, Boone," said Thurlowe. "And the first sign of treachery I get from mine I'll put a bullet through their heads with a great deal of pleasure. I've small use for their kind of cowardly turncoats."

"At least they came to us of their own accord," said Boone. "We'll give them a fair show."

"Ye'll never win a prize in a dog-show with a coyote," countered Thurlowe. "I'm for forty winks. Good night, Boone, you're handling this thing in fine style, lad. Good night."

THERE had been a good deal of light-hearted chaffer among the members of the *Roamer's* crew from the outset, whatever thoughts lay beneath the surface, but something of grim purpose began to show on their faces as they busied themselves in preparing for the second encounter. Captain Newell, visibly improved since the restoration of his daughter, stayed aboard with Huddy and Sanders, the latter in command of the disconsolate schooner-guard. Marion Newell came to the rail in the darkness to wish the boats success.

"I wish you'd let me come with you," she said. "Good luck and thank you again, Captain Boone and all of you!"

She laid her hand on Boone's arm as he stood by the rail, and the thrill within him quickened to a demand that he take her there and then within his arms. He glanced down at the little fingers, pale and fragile in the starlight, and laid his own over them for a second.

"Thanks," he said, his voice sounding oddly gruff and far away in his own ears.

"Fair Maiden," said Von der Mehden with easy gallantry, making light of the occasion as of all others, "you are about to send your knights forth to battle for your fair sake. Wait for the explosion. Give me a token to wear as talisman. I haf no helmet to which to bind it, but I can fasten it to my sleeve. It will assure that the dynamite goes off in the right direction."

Marion laughingly unfastened a ribbon from her neck and gave it to the light-hearted German who tied it about his arm and took his place in the boat. Boone felt a sudden pang of jealousy, vexed at his own lack of wit, envious of the gage that Otto carried proudly.

But the mood passed as the boats left the schooner and passed through the luminous water of the lagoon toward the crater entrance.

Violet fire dripped from the blades of the oars as they rowed under the cliffs, a green veil of phosphorescence trailing in their wake. Now and then the leap of a fish

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broke like a sudden water-firework. Even for those latitudes, where the sea is never untenanted by the ocean fireflies, the display was unusual, a certain portent of an imminent change in the weather.

The ripples lapped against the cliffs with weird reflections and the waves that topped the reef shattered their crests in ghostly illumination. Boone did not forbid conversation, as there was practically no danger of being overheard with the pirates cooped up in the inner crater, a mile or more away.

"I'm thinkin' the water o' the River Styx must be like this," said Campbell. "Only the fire o' this is cauld. There'll be some o' the de'il's yonder crossin' the tide wi' Charon before another nicht, likely."

"Here's hoping we're not in the same ferry," said Boone. "Where's your lodge, Otto?"

"Right here. Up you go, Bockstatt."

The two Germans were landed and clambered up the cliff to a shelf well above high water, where their wires connected with the batteries. There was the flare of an electric torch as they examined the contact wires.

"All ready for action," reported Otto.

"I'll get up to where we can see each other, Otto," said Boone. "We'll let the *Ghost* get close enough to talk before you set her off. I'll give you the signal and you can pass it on to Bockstatt. If they don't come out, we'll reserve the mine for later developments. How far along are the caves?"

"Close to the other side of the channel. You can't miss them. *Auf wiedersehen!*"

The two boats crossed the entrance on the flood, already swirling through the narrow channel, and readily found the wave-worn hollows in the cliff with the aid of their torches. There was water enough to enter, and, leaving the native boys to look after them, the white men, including the new recruits, waded across the weed-coated rocks and found a way up the face of the wall to a ledge where they waited for daylight to reveal the best place of vantage.

As they settled down, making themselves as comfortable as they could on their rocky perches, Boone climbed higher till he was looking into the star-sown void of the crater. The silence that always deepens just before dawn seemed to brood around and above him, like the shadow of heavy wings, broken only by the low sound of the combers at the reef-barrier, rising in shadowy hills, falling in luminous foam.

From across the channel where Bockstatt and Von der Mehden clung like limpets to the rocks came the low, clear tones of Otto's voice in his perpetual love-song. Boone could see him faintly, humped up on the rim of the cliffs, hardly a hundred feet away. He was singing softly, but the words were distinguishable in the stillness, though Boone failed to understand all their meaning.

Ob ich dich liebe? Frage dich selber.
Hab' ich auch nie dir meine Lieb' vertraut.
Ob ich dich liebe? Frag' meine Augen,
Immer hast du's in ihnen geschaut.

Ich dich liebe—Ich liebe dich. Boone remembered an engraving he had seen above that title. Two lovers at an open window. *Ich dich liebe.* His tense mood softened to thoughts of Marion.

Love seems, to us purblind mortals, to choose strange times for the pushing of his claims. Boone—on war and death intent—found himself dawn-dreaming of the girl whose touch, whose presence, the lightest thought of whom, set quivering deep within him the mysterious thrill that, first inspiring sympathy and protection, now bid fair to assume the mastery of all his being and guide his thoughts into new ways of tenderness and longing.

Through the swift stress of the pursuit, the finding and the fight, he had thought but little of Marion, save as a woman in distress. Cupid had apparently been inert, while all the time that master-musician had been quietly setting his stops, preparing for a triumphal strain that hinted in its subtle harmonies a wedding-march.

Not that his thoughts were altogether pleasant ones. First-love, not of youth, but early manhood, is generally self-deprecatory, and Boone, with a real man's lack of appreciation of his own worth in a lady's eyes, set aside the value of his superb, clean-lving body, making the frequent error of lovers that love is a child of the brain, not the elemental call of fitting mate to mate, an irresistible power behind, beyond the reason.

Otto's facile gallantry haunted him. The German, with his resources of education, travel, means and rank, seemed to Boone a man much more likely to be desired by Marion, whom he invested with all a lover's magic mist of infinite delicacy, than the rough, uncultured sailor he deemed himself. The only sign of preference the

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girl had shown, to his mind, had been manifested in the ribbon token Otto, singing love-songs on the opposite cliff, now bore upon his sleeve.

A touch on the arm aroused him from his reverie. Thurlowe had climbed to his side.

"Daybreak," said the elder skipper.

THE horizon shivered and turned gray, then coppery rose. The sun thrust itself abruptly from its sea-couch, not radiantly, as usual, but with the sullen glow of a bronze shield reflecting fire. The sky as it lightened seemed covered with a film. The sea, emerald within, deep blue beyond the reef, was dulled in its hues like the tones of an ancient rug. Below on their ledge the men yawned and stretched, shivering a little from excitement and lack of sleep, like dogs in a blind, waiting for the fight.

With their feet resting on a narrow shelf some five feet below the rim the two captains cautiously viewed the basin and the cliffs beyond. The tide curled snakily as it still surged through the channel, lifting the seabeards of the rocks at the foot of the inner cliffs. There was no sign of the *Ghost* yet, no movement by the mangrove-hidden creek or on the distant slopes. A band of pink stained the rim of the crater, slowly widening as the sun rose.

Across the channel Von der Mehden had descended to the side of Bockstatt and the two stood staring upward at the rim of the crater. Von der Mehden turned and catching sight of Boone beckoned earnestly.

Boone made a shell of his palms and called across.

"What is it, Otto?"

"Come over here."

Boone glanced down to the lagoon. There was some risk of sharks in the flooding tide, but he decided to take it.

"Hold my guns, will you Thurlowe?" he asked. "I'll swim across. They might see the boat. Can't tell where a lookout may be hidden now."

He stripped at the water's edge, borrowing a knife from a native boy in case of some intruding sea-wolf, set it between his teeth and swam across, keeping under water as he passed the open channel. He scrambled over the rough rocks to where the two Germans still gazed upward. As he gained their side his eyes followed Otto's directing arm. To the left, from the rim of the crater, in a little notch of the lava, an extended arm projected stiffly, the clenched fist palm downward. On the wrist showed Sleeth's Mark in tattoo, the skull with a bone between it's teeth.

"Dead?" asked Boone.

Otto nodded.

The three climbed to the rim. Across the cliff-top lay the emaciated body of a white man clad in canvas trousers. Ribs and backbone protruded through the scant flesh covering. A livid bruise covered one side. In the other an arrow was sunk deeply.

Boone pulled it out with an effort and turned the body face to the sky.

It was Yates, the renegade supercargo.

"Poor devil," said Boone. "That's what he got for funking it last night. The natives got him. Evidently they are out for business, seeing we've started matters. They are likely to give Sleeth trouble as he comes out. On the other hand, they are liable to keep him busy inside. It's to be hoped they leave us alone."

"What shall you do with this?" asked Von der Mehden, covering the dead man's face with a handkerchief.

The rosy sunband, creeping onward, touched the putty-colored flesh and gave it a semblance of returning life.

"We can't leave it here," said Boone. "Probably Newell would want to give him decent burial. He was his supercargo, you know. It wasn't all his fault that he was a coward. He was probably always getting licked, from school up. Let's get it down by the water in the shade. We can get it aboard later."

They set the battered, pitiful shell of Yates in the shadow of a great boulder, Von der Mehden stripping off his own silk shirt to cover the naked chest. Then he and Bockstatt climbed back to their posts while Boone swam the channel.

Dressing swiftly, Boone rejoined Thurlowe and found the latter looking through his binoculars at some moving figures on the top of the cliffs by the creek.

"Natives," he said, handing over the glasses.

"I expected something like that," replied Boone. "They got Yates over there on the the other side of the channel. They're on the warpath it seems. All the better, as long as they leave us alone."

The lenses revealed a drawn-out file of

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Papuans, seldom more than one showing at a time, crawling antlike along the summit of the cañon that dominated the stream joining the inner and outer basins.

"Looks as if Sleeth was getting ready to come out," said Boone. "I guess he's caught a glimpse of the *Roamer*. It's up to him to get clear of the island whether he does us up or not. He'll be afraid of our having told others the position of the island. He don't know where we got it, probably, and hardly thinks it safe to linger."

"Did you find out anything about the chap we left on Matemotu?" asked Thurlowe.

"The Other One? Yes. Doane, down there—" he indicated one of the renegades perched below them—"says he was Sleeth's right-hand man till Cree joined. He split with Sleeth over Cree's advancement. Sleeth set him down, cut off his share to the same as the men's, and, when he kicked, manhandled him. He was afraid to kill him on account of the chap's popularity, so he shipped him to Matemotu, crippled up and off his head. Thinks he's dead, I suppose. You know the poor devil hides whenever Sleeth shows up."

"Reckon the tide's about full," said Thurlowe. "Looks that way to me."

FROM the rim across which they peered the inner wall sloped sharply to the water where the weedy rocks were now submerged. Hummocks of lava stood out here and there from the tufa and there was a rough trail, like the bed of a dried torrent, forming a rude stairway up and down which desperate men might climb.

"Listen!" warned Boone.

The *chug-chug* of a gasoline-engine, tossed back and forth by the cliffs, came to them across the basin. Boone spoke to the men beneath them.

"Haley, you and Mr. Campbell get the men ready. Don't come up here till I tell you. See that every one's magazine is full."

The crack of a rifle sounded from the creek cañon, followed swiftly by others, the echoes multiplying and magnifying the reports to a fusillade.

"Here they come," said Boone. "Look out, Otto!" he shouted to the German, who, his head close to the crater-rim between his folded arms, waved a hand in signal of readiness.

"The Kanakas are getting in their work," said Thurlowe as the scattering shots turned to a constant volley. "There she blows!"

The bows of the *Ghost* showed gray through the mangroves and the schooner, stripped of sails, glided into the basin. The Papuans, now helpless to attack with their primitive weapons, circled the lips of the crater in vain pursuit.

"We'll have to keep those natives off if they get much closer," said Boone.

He kept his glasses trained on the *Ghost*. No more shots came from her decks in what would have been largely wasted ammunition, and men came up from below till there were half a hundred or more of them crowding the decks. One man distinctively bigger than the rest, his head wrapped in a black scarf, directed a group that labored amidships about some object that stood between the two masts.

"Those Kanakas have put that machine-gun of Sleeth's out of business," announced Boone delightedly. "Smashed it up with a rock, I guess. They're working on it like beavers. Now they've given it up. By Jove, Thurlowe!" he exclaimed as the schooner, the exhaust of its engine sounding steadily, forged across the quiet water of the basin, "there are women on board."

"Afraid to leave them behind, I reckon," commented Thurlowe. "Or as you said Sleeth is figuring to clean us up and make a clear getaway."

Whang!

A bullet struck the rock below and between them with a vicious impact.

"Good shooting that!" said Boone. "Must have caught the flash of the glasses. It's that tall chap with the red sash. Look out."

Another bullet whistled overhead as the two skippers sought and found cover behind an outcrop of flinty rock.

"Nice looking gang," said Thurlowe. "Going to take a pot at 'em before you let loose the mine?"

The gray schooner was rapidly nearing the channel, it's crew gazing upward at the cliff. Practically all were naked to the waist and barefooted, many wore only loin-cloths, but all were gay with vivid headcloths and sashes, above which belts carried knives and pistols. Aft, about the dominant, bull-like figure, were grouped a dozen or more gaily clad women, applauding the shots of the tall marksman.

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"We might hit the women," answered Boone. "We'll have them all where we want them in a few seconds." He raised his voice. "All right, Otto!" he shouted.

A volley of shots flew above them as they crouched, waiting for the explosion.

The seconds passed and the *Ghost*, headed direct for the center of the fifty-foot channel, was practically immediately beneath them. They could have tossed a cartridge on to her decks.

"Mine's fizzled out," said Thurlowe. "Wish we had a few loose rocks handy. We could sink 'em easy."

"Otto!" cried Boone again, risking his head for a look across the strait.

The men on the schooner were firing straight up the face of the cliff. Von der Mehden's head was still sunk between his shoulders, resting on his folded arms. His figure seemed strained, curiously rigid.

"They've potted Otto!" cried Boone. "Bockstatt, fire the mine. Bockstatt!"

AS HE shouted, the crater wall heaved beneath them and seemed to lift with the dull roar of the exploding dynamite. Masses of rock hurtled upward and outward, a column of green water spouted—white-maned like a rearing dragon—and fell.

Smaller geysers leaped as the rock fragments dropped into the gut, piling one on the other, until as silence came with the dying echoes the passage showed in a great raw gap of red rock, like a bleeding maw, with jagged boulder-teeth rising here and there from the water.

The *Ghost* lay, her bows high lifted on a submerged reef, raised by the explosion, the foremast snapped, the stays dangling, her crew crowded aft in consternation.

The stout leader rushed forward to the shattered bowsprit and stood defiant, shouting curses at the cliff-tops where the adventurers stood looking down on the confusion, with rifles covering the deck of the schooner at short range. About the crater lips the Papuans were scrambling with the agility of baboons down the slopes and gathering by the ruined huts at the mouth of the creek.

Boone, still in the shelter of the rock, disposed his riflemen along the ledge on which he stood, cautioning them to keep to cover closely, and called down to the stranded vessel.

"Tell your men not to fire, Sleeth," he cried, "and we'll talk. We've got you covered, and if you start trouble we'll riddle the schooner like a sieve."

Sleeth, his legs wide apart, braced on the sloping deck, ceased his futile tirade. His great frame was wadded with fat that hung in folds from age-slackened muscles. His bull-neck had outgrown to fill the natural incurves from the chin and base of the skull. His protuberant paunch was flabby. His big arms, from elbows to finger knuckles, were covered with the same tangle of red hair that masked the barrel of his deep chest.

His face, heavy-jowled to meet the neck, was hairless and heavily pitted. He wore a black sash and leather belt about his coarse canvas trousers for his only covering. Yet, with all the drag of years of ill-living showing in his lax bulk, he loomed eminently the leader. The defiant glare of his eyes, deep-socketed in the fleshy cheeks, could be felt rather than seen. He retreated to the wreck of the machine-gun and bellowed an order to his men.

"Who are you?" he cried.

"Well," said Boone, "here are Thurlowe and Newell, Huddy and Boone, with enough more to amply take care of you." He bent down and whispered to the ledge of men crouching with their rifles ready, eager to take active part, "Give a cheer, boys, a loud one."

Led by Haley and Campbell, they shouted at the full of their lungs. The native boys below with the boats echoed them, and from Bockstatt, who had mounted to the side of Von der Mehden, came a stentorian "*Hoch!*"

The hurrahs had a palpable effect. The buccaneers on the *Ghost* stirred in uneasy clusters. One of them, the tall man with the red sash who had been the sharpshooter, joined Sleeth and talked with him, gesturing earnestly.

"Send a boat over for Bockstatt and Von der Mehden, Haley," ordered Boone. "You go with it, Campbell, and see what you can do for him."

"Dinna start the fechtin' till I'm back then," replied the Scotchman, as he started for the water's edge.

Sleeth dismissed his adviser with a sweep of his hand.

"What do you want?" he called up.

"You," answered Boone. "And your

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loot. That's first. We take you to Suva. The rest of you we'll leave on Matemotu till the British Government sends for them. Throw your arms overboard and come through the channel six at a time. Swim if you can't wade. We'll get the women later."

The ultimatum was received with loud talking from the crowd of buccaneers and their women. They shouted counsel to Sleeth with violent gesticulations. He silenced them with a bass roar.

Cupping his hands he bellowed furiously back to Boone.

"I'll see you in hell first!" he shouted.

"By the Eternal, you'll be there yourself in a minute," cried Thurlowe. "Look yonder, Boone!"

OUT from the little beach by the huts came a floating barricade of poles and timbers and bits of the unburned thatch, pushed steadily across the basin by the lusty arms of swimming Papuans. Behind it bobbed ten-score of frizzy heads. Weapons glinted and arms flashed wet in the sunrise, while shrill cries sounded fiercely across the watery sounding-board.

"Better make up your mind quickly, Sleeth," called Boone. "We'll treat you better than your friends in the water there. If you lay down, we'll hold them off. If not——"

Sleeth's only reply was a voluble string of oaths. The buccaneers commenced firing at the floating shield, apparently without effect. The barrier split and came on, one half to the left and one to the right of the stranded schooner, the Papuans evidently intending to attack their trapped masters from both sides. The war cries grew louder and more triumphant, the eyes of the revengeful savages showed as they rolled exultantly while the rafts steadily closed in on the ill-fated *Ghost*.

"We can't let those brutes get at the women, Thurlowe," said Boone.

"They can for all of me," answered Thurlowe. "They're worse devils than the men. Didn't they smoke that poor devil of a Yates?"

One or two of the shots were taking effect on the swimmers, but there were two hundred Papuans behind the shields, water adepts, diving and swimming beneath the surface, their positions hidden by the rafts; hard targets for the best of shots, relentless in the memories of a thousand wanton cruelties suffered at the hands of their late masters, at last within striking distance.

Confusion broke out on the *Ghost* as the barriers simultaneously neared the sides of the schooner whose lowered stern presented but a low freeboard to the attack. A ring of men surrounded Sleeth in excited argument. Campbell, followed by the native boys, mounted to the cliff-top. "The Dutchman's no deid," he said. "Shot through the right palm an' clipped senseless by a spent bullet. He'll do nicely. Bockstatt's wi' him i' the boat. Am I in time?"

"Well, Sleeth, what's your answer?" shouted Boone, as the pirates prepared to repel the Papuans, now swarming on to their rafts preparatory to climbing the rail of the schooner.

Sleeth broke from the crowding men, shook both fists in imprecation, rushed aft to the companionway and disappeared below.

"He's quit," said Thurlowe. "Gone to get the loot. He's a bit late in making up his mind."

The buccaneers were furiously endeavoring to repel the onslaught of the savages, women as well as men firing pistols and thrusting back at the natives with improvised weapons.

"That ends it, an' naught fired but the mine," said Campbell dejectedly. "Man Boone, do ye ca' this fechtin'?"

The Papuans were gradually gaining foothold on the decks, thrusting with spears and smiting with heavy war clubs as they shouted when Sleeth reappeared, coming forward to the bows.

"You'll go back empty-handed after all, you bloody man-hunters," he yelled, foam flecking his lips. "Now, lads," he turned to his crew, engaged in hand to hand conflict with the savages, "the chorus, out with it!"

A fig for the priest and the black crow's feast,
Die game, my lads, die game!

His deep voice hoarsely trolled the chorus. Some of his men took it up half-heartedly as they repelled the Papuan rush, then catching his meaning, changed to a shriek, half rage, half despair, and those near the companionway shrank from it, regardless of their foes, as they noted the coils of smoke rolling sluggishly upward. Threads of vapor writhed from the after hatch.

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"Ha! Ha!" laughed Sleeth insanely. "There's twenty casks of gasoline and oil aboard! Die game, my lads, die game!"

"The man's stark crazy," said Campbell.

The buccaneers ceased resistance to the Papuans who still struck fiercely, as if unconscious of the danger or careless for anything but revenge. Some of the pirates sprang overboard, others rushed below in an attempt to stay the flames.

"Between the de'il an' the deep sea fu' o' his servants," said the Scotchman.

A sheet of flame burst from the companionway. The deck appeared to rise intact, then to crumple like paper. The schooner was instantly enveloped in a searing blast of exploding gases like the roar of a bursting volcano. Masts lifted through the dazzling glare, the air scorched the lungs of the watchers, the cliffs reverberated with sudden thunders and settled to silence.

There was hardly a sign left of the *Ghost.* The fumes of the gas, red in the morning sunlight, floated high above the crater, here and there blackened fragments floated where burned swimmers strove in agony. The rafts of the Papuans had disappeared and the savages who had escaped the explosion, diving deep at the flash, were swimming fast for the shores.

Boone and his men stood aghast at the spectacle.

"God, but that was awfu'!" said Campbell. "Wiped oot like marks fra' a slate. But the de'il takes care o' his ain. He's some man, yon Sleeth. Look at him!"

5 STRIKING out for the shore beneath them, with a vigor that seemed incredible, came the leader of the buccaneers. His scarf had been blown from his head, exposing its absolute baldness across which ran a smear of blood. Behind him struggled four others, one a woman.

"It's Jude Demoulins," cried Boone. "She's swimming the wrong way. She must have been blinded. Get down the slope, men, and help them. Pick off those Papuans!"

A dozen savages had turned and were swimming rapidly to overtake the survivors. As the shots pattered and ricochetted about them, one warrior with a yell reached his victim. A knife flashed, the buccaneer disappeared, and the Papuan, fast swimming under water, presented only a momentary mark as he escaped.

"That's ane," said Campbell, as a shot from Boone reached its target and a savage threw up his arms and sank. "An' that's twa!" And his own bullet smashed into a dusky skull.

Another pirate went down with a shriek as his savage opponent clubbed him. A Papuan grasped for the woman, who grappled with him as they swam, striking at him with a knife she held in her free hand. They went down together in a swirl of water that had not yet smoothed when Jude Demoulins reappeared, gasping but triumphant, her knife left in the breast of the savage, twelve fathoms below.

Haley waded out to meet her, guiding her by his shouts. She touched the shoal that had been made by the exploding dynamite and stopped irresolutely.

"It's all right," said the mate. "Come ahead, we're not fighting women."

He reached her hand and led her to the shore and up the slope.

Sleeth was stumbling among the slippery rocks, a savage close behind him, intent on transfixing him with his spear. The other buccaneer had reached the shore and fallen exhausted, face downward, regardless of foes ahead or behind.

"Cover Sleeth," cried Boone to Campbell as they raced to the water, automatics in hand. The pirate leader was in the direct line of his own fire and he emptied his clip into the two Papuans about to strike the prostrate man.

"Drop, you loon," cried Campbell, and Sleeth slumped forward into a pool. The Scotchman fired as the savage lunged. Both fell, the frizzly head of the native plunging beneath the water as he dropped dead across Sleeth, half submerged in the pool.

From higher up, Thurlowe and the rest fired at the retreating Papuans while Boone ran to Campbell's side. The hardwood spear of the savage had sunk deep into him below the ribs, the shark's-teeth edge tearing a ghastly wound.

"I'm done for," said Campbell faintly. "It wasna much of a fecht, but it was better than nane."

He fainted, and at Boone's orders was borne carefully up the slope.

Thurlowe turned his pistol on the buccaneer saved by Boone's pistol. The man

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had recovered sufficiently to sit up. His face and naked torso were black and crimson from smoke and burns, his hair and long mustache were singed to a crisp, but he essayed a smile.

"Don't shoot, old chap," he said. "No need. I'm all in. Honor bright! Look after the guv'nor, will you?"

"You nearly potted me on the cliff from the schooner," said Thurlowe sourly. "I've a mind to show you I can shoot straighter and save hemp."

"Sighted too low, y' know," answered the tall marksman. "You've got me where you want me. Bear a hand with the guvnor, there's a good scout."

"He's cheated the gallows," said Thurlowe, glancing to where the men were dragging the heavy, limp body of Sleeth from beneath the Papuan in the pool.

"Not half," protested the singed pirate. "Not the guv'nor. Not born to be drowned, y' know."

It seemed as if his hopeful diagnosis were correct. Sleeth, under the ministrations of two men, commenced to moan as they attempted to get the water from his lungs. Presently he sat up weakly between them, coughing feebly but eminently alive.

The two boats bearing the body of Yates and the three prisoners was rowed back to the schooner in silence. Campbell remained unconscious, moaning a little continually, and Von der Mehden, while there seemed to be no real fracture of the skull from the spent or glancing bullet that had struck his forehead, was also senseless for the time. His head had been bound up by Campbell, who had also bandaged his hand. For Campbell himself there seemed nothing more to be done than the stanching of the flow of blood, which had been already accomplished.

Sleeth sat slumped in the stern of Boone's boat, between the skipper and Bockstatt. The man was evidently at the fagged end of his strength, but his spirit still sat behind his eyes, which were greenish-gray, cold and set as a shark's, and the renegade oarsmen uneasily endeavored to avoid his sinister look of contempt and derision.

Jude Demoulins and the tall buccaneer, identified by one of the rowers as Black George, maker and singer of songs, blackguard and discarded son of British gentry, were in Thurlowe's charge. The woman's wild beauty had vanished utterly, the searing gas that had destroyed her sight had been, in a measure, merciful, hiding from her the face that was doomed to perpetual disfigurement.

Her mane of hair was burned away, her neck and arms badly scorched. She seemed sensible of her lost attractions, though she disdained to complain of her hurts, and wrapped her head in the red sash given her by Black George, who, singed but jaunty, smoked a cigarette he had begged with as debonair a manner as if he had been the successful leader of the raid.

ONCE aboard the *Roamer*, Sleeth and Black George were stowed in the afterhold, lightly fettered to the mainmast. Campbell and Von der Mehden were borne to their bunks, where Thurlowe, aided by Bockstatt, tended them to the extent of his rude skipper's surgery. The body of Yates was laid in the shadow of a rail, and, at Boone's orders, covered with a flag in recognition of the aid he had given to the best of his spirit's poor ability.

Marion Newell had taken charge of Jude Demoulins with an instant cry of pity for her plight and ready forgiveness of the evil the stricken woman would once have perpetrated upon her. Cree's mistress mutely suffered herself to be led below, without murmur of thanks or show of distress.

"Better be careful, Miss Marion," warned Boone. "I wouldn't trust her too far. She may have a weapon somewhere about her."

Marion Newell flashed him an indignant look.

"She's suffering terribly," she said. "We're not afraid of each other."

Boone turned away as they went below. The dignities of leadership were more than offset by its difficulties and responsibilities, he thought, and there was much in hand to be done. A look at the barometer had revealed a drop of five points since he had left the schooner, the signs of foul weather close at hand had grown plainer.

The mounting sun still glowed like reflecting copper, and sky and sea held their unnatural hues. From sea to zenith the sky arched cloudless in a dome of dull, brassy metal; the water inside the reef was opaque, cloudy green, and the ocean outside the color of dishwater. The life had gone out of it, the foam of the reef was thin, like greasy soapsuds, and the air seemed to leave

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a sour taste upon the tongue as it came in hot puffs that set the palms and undergrowth on the little promontory tossing uneasily.

"We've got to get out of here," he said to Haley, his first mate. "It's going to blow like Sam Hill presently, and, if it comes from the south'ard as it should, we don't want to be caught on a lee shore if we can help it, much less in the lagoon. We'll have to tow outside. The native boys have had a rest; they can tackle it. We'll set a kedge on the reef from the stern and haul up short on the bow anchor.

"Bend a line on the kedge, we may have to cut and slip cables in a hurry if we get any wind, for I don't believe for a minute we're through with those natives. And tell Ong Chuck to fix up a hot breakfast, will you? If the rest are as hungry as I am, he'd better double his rations."

Haley departed and Boone went over to where the five deserters stood near the body of their late comrade.

"We're going to tow outside, men," he said. "The native boys will take the boats. You men have behaved well. Now I'm not going to set myself up as judge of the circumstances that made you join Sleeth. Yates there has atoned and we'll give him sea burial. But it's up to you from now on.

"Those natives are not going to let us get away if they can help it, and if the calm lasts much longer there's going to be trouble that will take all hands to ward off. I don't know if I am doing the right thing, or the wise one, but if you stand by in good shape I'm not going to hand you over to the authorities at Suva. I'll set you ashore on Vanua Levu, and if you keep quiet a while you can set your own plans for steering straight after this. Meanwhile you can fix up quarters for yourself in the trade-room. Do we understand each other?"

The men answered him gratefully in protestations of past hard luck and resolve to keep clear of trouble in the future. They realized their position. It would be a hard matter for them to prove that they had thrown in their lots with Sleeth under duress, and the consciences of all of them were not entirely clear from having shared in the profits of the pirate's raids.

"Poor devils," thought Boone as he walked away. "They had to save their skins, I suppose; they're not made of the stuff that walks the plank. I expect they've wished themselves dead many a time. And they'll carry that brand of Sleeth's on their wrists until they are."

THE boats were swung out and the *Roamer* towed slowly through the sluggish water that seemed to have lost all its buoyancy, beyond the reef into deep water, where they anchored South Sea fashion, swinging between two cables, one holding to the coral of the reef at a sharp slant, the other dropping with its heavy anchor to grip the bottom, thirty fathoms down. Boone overlooked the giving out of fresh ammunition, and, after a hearty share in the meal provided by Ong Chuck, who still retained his piratical make-up, went to see Von der Mehden.

Bockstatt had swathed his head in wet bandages beneath which the German's blue eyes opened with some of their old twinkle as Boone entered.

"*Himmel*, Dick," he whispered. "Such a *katzenjammer*. I've got a lump the size of a cocoanut up here and I'll have a headache for a month. I hope my brains aren't scrambled. They fixed me so I can't use my right hand, too, and I can't shoot worth a *kreutzer* with my left. Bored a hole clean through the palm. How did it all come out?"

Boone told him. The plucky, light-hearted chap's eyes filled with tears as he heard of Campbell.

"That's bad news. I suppose it's all up with him. I liked him, Dick. He was game all through. He——"

Haley entered the little cabin abruptly.

"Natives gettin' busy on the beach, sir," he announced. "Seem to be building some sort of a raft again. Goin' to try the same dodge on us they did on the *Ghost*."

Von der Mehden tried to sit up, but dropped back again groaning.

"Ach, my head," he exclaimed. "Just my luck. I don't believe I can even crawl out to see the fun. Don't forget those extra bombs I made, Dick. Bockstatt, you look after them. I'll be all right."

On the promontory the Papuans were busy amid the palms and brush and on the sandy beach, repeating their tactics of building something that would act partly as a shield and partly as a base from which to board the schooner. They had felled several trees, and the glass showed them working about a rude catamaran built of two trunks

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rudely platformed with boughs. To this they were attaching outriggers.

Boone tried a shot or two, but the savages dragged their craft behind a pile of rocks and he gave up the attempt and turned to watch Bockstatt at work upon his infernal machines.

The bombs were simple enough. Two clusters of dynamite sticks had been capped and joined by a quick-fire fuse, which the German was shortening to the limit for quick explosion.

"That was a good thought of Mr. Von der Mehden's," said Boone. "We'd have been hard put to it without dynamite, Bockstatt. I have a few sticks aboard which I use for fishing, but I would never have thought of the mine."

"Der poy iss a gut poy," rejoined the engineer. "Also he has prains which he uses. We stop dem, dose natifs. They haf no guns. If they gome on der raft, it iss simble. We drop dese—und the sharks haf preakfast. If dey swim in der water I haf somedings else to gif them for a surbrise barty. Yes?"

He displayed a number of half sticks, each with a short fuse—a battery of hand-grenades frightfully destructive at short range.

"Good work, Bockstatt," said Boone. "A dose or two of that medicine will soon cure them. We'll try picking them off as they come through the reef channel. I wish the wind would start, gale or no gale. I'd rather take a chance with the weather for a change. I'm sick of this butcher business."

The revulsion of the past twelve hours—it was barely that since they had entered the creek to rescue the girl—was still to manifest itself fully to all of them. As yet the horror of it all, with the burning of the *Ghost* and the awful death of the buccaneers, was still too close to seem real. And there was action enough forward to fully occupy their minds. The catamaran was setting out from shore, propelled by clumsy paddles and the thrusts of swimming Papuans.

Boone turned to place his riflemen along the rail and found Marion by his side.

"You had better go below," he said bruskly. Then, more gently, "How is your patient?"

"She is in great distress," answered the girl. "Mental as well as physical. Just think what she has been through, Captain Boone."

He shrugged his shoulders. He had little sympathy with the woman in the light of her attitude to Marion on the crater trail, and he was still smarting from the position the latter had placed him in upon his warning her against Jude when she was first brought aboard. Neither did he relish the "Captain Boone."

Once having progressed to the intimacy of first names it is hard for masculine admirers to understand the tactical withdrawals of privilege by the lady. And he was really anxious to get her below, not merely from danger, but to spare her the sight of a conflict which promised to be as desperate as the one just ended, mercifully hidden from her eyes within the crater.

"Go below now, please," he said. "This is no place for you."

As she went, a trifle indignantly, he felt that he had made another blunder of clumsy speech and knew the masculine impatience of feminine insistence upon all the courtesies, at a moment when there was urgent work ahead.

"Get ready, there," he called to the men kneeling by the rail, their rifles ready. "Try and stop them at the reef. Watch your splashes."

Despite their best efforts the rifle-fire was comparatively ineffective. The range was at an angle and the view obscured by the mounting waves breaking on the reef. Most of the Papuans were in the water, and the clumsy catamaran came on slowly.

"Better hold your fire," said Boone. "They can't hurt us yet. Look out for arrows till they get closer up. Bockstatt, wait till I give you the word. I'll let them get where you can reach them, but I'll have to swing the schooner or we'll be blown out of the water. Here comes the wind, thank heaven."

"*Ja*, I wait," said the German laconically, blowing on a spare length of fuse to keep it ready for lighting his bombs.

THE puffs of wind were commencing to join forces in a breeze that sent the waves curling nastily about the raft, on which the savages were beginning to clamber, yelling fiercely and brandishing their weapons, evidently encouraged by the lack of firing, which Boone still reserved, into the belief that the white men were short of ammunition. Balked of personal revenge on their late tyrants, the

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buccaneers, the *Roamer* with its fittings was a rich prize, to say nothing of their bloodlust and the feast that would come afterward.

Thurlowe came over and stood by Boone. Arrows began to fly, quivering as they stuck in the deck and masts.

"Look out," warned Boone. "Keep in cover of the rail. They may be poisoned."

The wind was beginning to hum through the rigging. The light failed, the sun losing its power to cast shadows, glowing in the hazy sky like an overheated metal bowl. Between the yells of the oncoming savages a low moan sounded from seaward. The schooner chafed at her bow cable and the seas began to pound at her timbers.

"Set a trysail on the main, and a storm jib, Haley!" cried Boone. "Jump to it! Stand by to cut the stern-line and slip the cable. Look out, Bockstatt! Are you ready? Wait till I give the word."

Bockstatt, his burning fuse in one hand ready to light the perilously shortened fuse of the first bomb, crouched by the rail. The catamaran, boiling with savages, was close alongside, the Papuans shouting in anticipated triumph.

"All ready, sir," reported Haley.

Boone glanced around. The native boys were belaying the sheets of the storm canvas. The catamaran bumped against the side of the schooner. Dusky fingers clutched at the rail.

"Take the wheel, Thurlowe!" he shouted. "Let go your bow cable, Haley. Smartly there!"

Sanders, ready with a hammer, smote at the shackle and the bolt dropped clear. The *Roamer* swung before the incoming seas, tearing away from the raft, paying off rapidly till it was almost parallel with the reef.

"Now, Bockstatt, let 'em have it!"

Boone ran to the stern and seized the ax from the man who held it. The German rose from his crouch, the fuse sputtering fiercely, and hurled the bomb into the midst of the savages as Boone severed the line that still held them to the reef.

There was a shattering roar, followed almost instantaneously by another, as the engineer tossed over his second bomb. Sheets of brown water spouted. The *Roamer* heeled to the shock of the dynamite, righted a little, and, leaning to the gale, plunged off at a tangent, gradually brought closer into the wind by Thurlowe, straining at the wheel.

Springing to the side Boone looked vainly for a sign of the Papuans, the schooner leaping, close-hauled under her scanty canvas, into the heart of the mounting storm. The waves, foamset now, rose high in tawny hills out of the roar of the monsoon. The lower headlands of the island were hidden as the *Roamer* dropped into the deep valleys, gallantly bucking the angry seas.

The force of the wind was terrific, the loose ends of ropes stood out stiffly like iron bars; the spume, cut from the crests by the fury of the gale, swept horizontally across the deck. The rigging shrilled like an orchestra of mighty harps. Thurlowe's long beard streamed over his shoulder. Boone, with a swift glance over the side, joined him at the wheel, adding his strength to the stubborn spokes.

He set his lips to Thurlowe's ear.

"No damage," he shouted. "We swung clear in time. How's she making it?"

"Can't keep—her—up," gasped Thurlowe as the wind strangled him. "Got to—run for it."

"Got to clear that headland!" Boone yelled back, looking over his shoulder at the cape of the higher mountain, showing black and menacing against a sky that had turned the color of slate. "We can—just—about—make it."

The gale shredded his voice to a whisper, but Thurlowe caught his meaning and they set themselves to hold the struggling schooner off the land.

They succeeded. Buffeted by the wind, blowing eighty miles an hour in its sudden wrath, the *Roamer*, clawing at the gale that buffeted it in anger that seemed to wax with every minute of the fight, as if furious at the presumption of the man-made thing, battled desperately, driven slantingly to leeward until the thunder of the reef, close in to the threatening headland, was scarce a cable's length away. As the skippers watched their chance to come about, growing more risky every second, the trysail on the main burst from its hold and was lost, a speck flying against the land, with a clap like a cannon shot.

The wheel whirled, the ready vessel spun on its keel. For an instant great masses of water seemed about to engulf her as she raced, beating the clutch of the sea, pounded

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by the fury of the monsoon gale, far, far to the southwest, Eremanga, if not its memories, blotted out in the wrack.

CHAPTER IX

BLACK GEORGE TELLS WHAT HE KNOWS

BOONE, with Thurlowe and Newell, stood in the little cabin by Campbell's bunk. Marion Newell was seated beside the dying man, trying to soothe his last few moments. The doughty Scotchman was conscious, though hardly capable of the speech he tried to utter.

"Drink this," said the girl, holding a glass to his lips with difficulty as the schooner reeled in the storm. Some of the liquor spilled on the covers.

"*Na, na,*" said Campbell, mustering his final strength. "I dinna like the smell o' it. I'll die a blue-ribboner. Ye'll be writin' hame for me, one of ye, hame ta Lairg. 'Tis i' Sutherland, ye'll fin' the address i' my coat. Tell them I died sober. 'Twill be a shock for them a', na doot, but they're used to them fra' me."

He turned his eyes to the weeping girl.

"Dinna greet, lassie, I've been a sair wastrel," he said faintly. "But i' ye hav' a Bible aboard there's a bit aboot green pastures an' the valley o' the Shadow my mither used to read, lang syne. I used to think it puir readin', but I remember it weel.

"Aye, an' still waters it spoke of," he added. "Listen ta the storm."

Marion hastened from the cabin. Campbell closed his eyes again, his fancy wandering back to Sutherland and the misty hills of Loch Shin.

"The loch's in a gey turmoil the nicht," he muttered, "an' the burn's in spate. There'll be no fishin' the morn. 'Tis awfu' dark, lads, but ye'll see the licht i' the tower i' a minnit."

The girl came back and started to read softly.

"Ah, that's guid," said Campbell. "I wonder now will there be heather yonder. Eh, yon's the licht, comin' over Ben More. 'Tis sunrise, surely——"

He closed his eyes, the haggard features relaxed and Captain Newell led his daughter from the cabin as Boone and Thurlowe composed the features of the gallant Highlander.

THREE days the *Roamer* ran before the monsoon, until at last they cleared its path and headed up for the long beat northward to Matemotu under blue skies mottled with the torn fleeces of high-sailing cloud. The double funeral of Yates and Campbell had taken place with all the ceremony the gale would allow, and all hands drank in the sweet breeze and invigorating sunshine with delight. The past seemed to have been wiped out in the storm, vanished like a nightmare at morning, and, as they relaxed, laughter came back to lips that had been long foreign to it.

But the stress of fight and storm had left its effects on all of them. The men seemed to have grown older. Boone wondered at his own gravity, while he tried to throw it off in the hope of soon seeing an end to the quest that had borne so many wild adventures.

Marion Newell was quieter, too, he noted. The dimples rarely showed nowadays, and she busied herself with tending Jude Demoulins and Von der Mehden, now able to sit up, and even walk dizzily, his arm in a sling, a great bump on his brow where the thwarted lead had left a souvenir.

Sleeth and Black George remained in the afterhold, close-guarded but unbound, the better to cope with the hardships of the storm. The latter had remained defiantly reckless of the gale, roaring snatches of song, taunting his leader, who seemed slow in recovering. Sleeth had begged for a Bible and striven to read it by the light of the lantern that dimly lit their prison, regardless of his comrade's jeers, moving a flabby finger continually across the page, quoting passages aloud. The men who took turns in guarding him believed him insane.

Jude Demoulins, blind and marred, her power for evil gone, was a close ward of Marion Newell's, who, in the necessarily close quarters, shared her cabin with the stricken woman. The young girl openly avowed her belief in Jude's repentance. She told Boone that her charge had repeatedly asked for him, but the skipper had put off his visit, facing repeated responsibilities he deemed superior to her claims.

Now as he started to visit her, Haley stopped him.

"There's some wreckage off the port bow, sir," he said. "Sternpost and a few timbers. There's a name on it, but I can't make it out for the wash."

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"Lower a boat," ordered Boone. "I'll go in her. Want to come, Thurlowe?"

The low-lying driftage was soon reached, evidently a relic of the gale through which they had won. The gilt had been washed from the lettering, but a sailor caught the planks with a boat-hook and they readily made out the deeply carved letters.

CREST OF THE WAVE
SYDNEY

"That clears up the bunch of them," said Thurlowe. "More hemp saved the stretching."

"Saves a heap of trouble," agreed Boone. "I was wondering what we could do. Fate seems to have decided this was the time-limit for Sleeth and his gang."

He forebore mentioning the incident to Marion. Conversation had languished between them in some manner inexplicable to him, and he did not feel like starting it with news of this kind.

"No use saying anything about it," he gave orders. "Not even to Sleeth."

He found Jude Demoulins listless in her bunk, her head covered with bandages. Marion was on deck reading to Von der Mehden who lay in a deck-chair in the sun. The constant unrest of the gale had kept him weak and feverish, and he was content to lie in drowsy lassitude, listening to the tales in the old magazines Marion had discovered.

"Is that you, Captain Boone?" asked Jude in a rich contralto voice that had lost the selvage of her wilder days.

"Yes," replied Boone, seating himself. "What is it you want? Miss Newell told me you wanted to see me."

"Miss Newell is an angel," declared the woman. "If there were more like her in the world, there would be less devils like me."

"It is on her account I have come to see you, though I doubt if I shall be able to do anything for you. I hardly feel qualified to deal with your case. I prefer to leave that to the proper authorities."

"Miss Newell has forgiven me. I do not ask you to follow her example," she went on with a touch of her old defiance as she sensed Boone's hostility. "But Miss Newell tells me you have given the five men who joined you from Sleeth another chance."

"They were pirates by force, not choice. They aided us all they could. They have in a measure redeemed themselves."

"Did I not help you?" she asked. "Could you have mastered Capwell so easily without me? Have I not suffered enough? I have lost the only man I love. He died in my arms, loving me again. My name was the last word he uttered. I have lost the power of making men look upon me without loathing. I know what these bandages hide, a face that will make men and women both shrink from me. I have lost the hope of ever caring again myself. Is not that punishment enough?"

"It hardly sounds like repentance."

"Repentance! What is repentance but an excuse to avoid punishment? Surely I have found my hell. Darkness and desolation. What more could your prison give? You say those men were forced to join," she went on hurriedly—vehemently. "What do you know about me? I had wild blood in my veins, born in me. Was it my fault that when men sought me, as they did, every pulse in me raced to keep pace with theirs?

"I'll not keep you long," she said as Boone moved in his chair. "I was kept close, too close, first in a convent, then by my brother who gave full swing to his impulses while he sought to chain mine. I met a man at last, who married me and took me away as I begged him. He was wild like me, and loved as he punished—fiercely. He was a devil, too. He taught me everything of evil, nothing of good. At the end he joined Sleeth, after he had made every port unwelcome. He was in Sleeth's confidence till Cree came.

"Then he and Sleeth quarreled and they said he was dead, and so I became Cree's dog. I loved him as I had never loved my husband, with such love as you could never understand. I loved him well enough to hate him, and the woman you love as well, in the jealousy that is only dammed up, rejected love. Now—" she choked down the hard sobs that shook her, grasping the side boards of the bunk with white, fierce fingers —"everything is gone. And you, who have won, have everything. If repentance means atonement, I shall repent all the hours of my life. Help me to do it—if you believe in it."

"How?"

"Let me go back to the convent where I was brought up. They will take me. I will take the veil. Behind it I may find peace for my soul and hide the face that is

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now a hideous mask. The girl you love asks it with me."

She lay exhausted by her violent emotion, panting, shaken again by the hard sobs. Boone could fancy tears that could not fall welling in the fire-scorched sockets beneath the wrappings. Marion wished it, would judge him by it. It was not much to ask. Justice could not demand much more than she was suffering and to suffer. Death, to such a nature, would be relief.

"Do you want me to take you to the convent?" he asked gently.

"No," she said, hope revitalizing her. "Take me to Levuka. Let me stay aboard and tell Louis Bodin that Jude Demoulins is there. He will do the rest when he knows all."

"Louis Bodin. You mean Levuka Louis?"

"Yes. He is my brother."

BOONE sat silent and amazed. This, then, was the secret of the intrigue he had suspected existed between the Frenchman and Sleeth. This was what Louis had meant in granting the redemption of the debt of his father, when he told him that he asked for more than he knew.

The blind woman's hand groped appealingly from the bunk.

"Well?" she asked.

Boone took her hand and gripped it firmly.

"All right," he said, and left her sobbing, her tears freed at last.

Marion Newell glanced up as he came on deck and walked aft. He nodded and was about to speak when she put a swift finger to her lips and motioned with a side tilt of her sunny head to Von der Mehden, who had fallen placidly asleep in the deck-chair.

Boone stopped, piqued. It seemed to him that she might readily have left the man who had the ill grace to sleep while she read to him for a word with the man who had served her as he had in his promise to Jude Demoulins.

Marion was beginning to seem hourly more desirable to Boone, even as something impalpable seemed to have entered into their friendship, coming between them. He failed utterly to realize that this veil of hesitation, instead of separating them, might be the tentative beginning of folds that should finally bind them the more closely. The more desirable she appeared, the less he calculated his chances to be.

He was finding out many things about her lately. He noted that her hair in the sun seemed to hold splintered rainbows in its mesh; he had discovered a tiny mole close to the one dimple in her left cheek and likened it, privately, to the star that the crescent moon sometimes holds in its embrace. He had loved the simile, not finding himself ridiculous. Had there been a volume of poetry aboard, he would probably have read it at night, secretly, in his bunk. As it was, he invested Marion with all the romance that his nature held, in a measure that would have surprised him had he suspected it.

He was genuinely angry at Von der Mehden for the slight he felt he had put upon Marion. He envied the German his facility of badinage and continually imagined that he discerned signs of a growing intimacy between the pair. He turned on his heel to meet Thurlowe's first mate, Sanders, coming up from below.

"Sleeth's bothering the head off the men on guard, sir," he said. "Demanding to see you, when he's not talking Bible. I think he's plumb crazy."

"Or playing it," answered Boone. "I'll see him."

He passed through the forecastle to the forehold and through that to the main. Both were practically empty and reeked with the odors of rancid copra and dried turtle. Inside, by the heavy door-hatch sat Thurlowe's supercargo, smoking, automatic in hand. Sleeth and Black George sat on the floor by the mainmast, beneath the lamp.

SLEETH was reading in rambling fashion from the book on his knees the same Bible from which Marion had read to Campbell. His head was sunk into the folds of his thick neck, tortoise-wise, his bald cranium reflecting the light.

Black George had a pack of cards spread in front of him, gained, like the pipe he was smoking, from his guards, in virtue of his cheerful bravado. He shifted his cards in the game of solitaire, singing the while, to the obvious annoyance of Sleeth, who paused now and then in his reading to give his comrade a look, the malevolence of which ill suited the nature of the book he held.

Boone waited for a moment by the door,

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the sliding of which had passed notice in the song that Black George sang while he deftly placed one card on the other.

Where are the gallant ships? Lost in the tide-rips.
Where are their gallant crews? Lost in the coral ooze.
Where are the arms that bound love-wreaths about them?
Where are the tender hearts, lonely without them?

Oh the life of a man is a short, short span,
And the bloom of a maid fades early.
Go, gather your plunder while you can;
Oh ho, for the teeth so pearly!
Rubies and diamonds, lips and eyes,
Arms of ivory. Gather your prize.
The anchor's up and the Roger flies:
Gather, ye seadogs surly!

"By Jove," he said as he ended the rollicking refrain. "Here's the gallant Captain himself, come to pay us a visit. Glad to see you, y' know. Don't mind Sleeth. No manners. Never had any. He's the original 'seadog surly.' At his devotions. Trying to learn a new system of bookkeeping so he can square his accounts. What, guv'nor?"

Sleeth looked up, his eyes sparking maliciously in the shadow of his hairless brows.

"I ask you, sir," he said addressing Boone, "if this is a place to keep a man thrice your age, old, weak, unarmed, forced to listen to the gibes of this fool. I am ill. My days are few——"

"And the hairs of your head jolly well numbered," broke in his comrade with a guffaw. "Well, Captain, so far as I'm concerned the jig's up, and I know it. The music was rippin', but it's all over but the Dead March. There he swings! What? Take us out of here. The cockroaches are good company compared to Sleeth here, but the bilge is bad and the copra takes away my appetite. Take us out. We'll be good little boys, won't we, guv'nor? And for pity's sake, Captain, give us something to wear."

BOONE looked at them. They were still clad in the scorched remnants of their canvas trousers. Black George's beard had sprouted and he looked a proper villain. The pox-pits that had hardly left their mark with him had seemingly killed the roots of all Sleeth's hair as far as his head was concerned, but the pirate leader's face glistened with sweat and dirt, and the blood from the blow on his head that he had got during his escape from his burning schooner was caked in a black smear.

"I'll send you some clothes," he said. "Are you ready to talk, Sleeth?"

The buccaneer's face looked like a dinted mask through which peered living eyes.

"Talk is vain and availeth nothing," he said.

"I've just had a long talk with Jude Demoulins," said Boone, fencing for an opening through the hypocrisy of Sleeth's talk, assumed, he felt sure, as a guard.

The mask seemed to slip for an instant, and the jade eyes gleamed in sudden cunning.

"Jude?" said Black George. "How is the old girl?"

"Blind," answered Boone. "And sorry."

"It is good to repent," said Sleeth. "I am glad she knows that the ways of evil are false."

Boone moved in disgust of the canting singsong of the man's glib speech, and Sleeth changed his tone.

"Might I ask our position, Captain?" he said almost whiningly.

"We are heading up for Matemotu."

Again the mask shifted. Black George stared blankly, then laughed.

"I can't stay any longer wasting time," said Boone. "Once again, Sleeth, are you ready to talk?"

The pirate countered.

"Are you taking me to Matemotu?" he asked.

Boone regarded him watchfully. The men had both been searched without avail. He had hoped to discover a hidden belt of pearls on Sleeth, or some chart or indication of the hiding-place of the treasure, which he felt sure had not been left behind on the schooner when Sleeth set it afire. One main object in making Matemotu was to bring off the Other One, and Marion had expressed a desire to visit her father's crater prison. Now it flashed across him with instant conviction that the treasure was hidden somewhere on the Island of the Dead.

"Yes," he answered. "First, then to Suva."

"Where the kindly British government will send us—further," said Black George.

Sleeth sat silently with eyes cast down upon his book.

"If I show you where the pearls are," he

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said at last, "will you leave me on the island?"

"I'll promise nothing," answered Boone. "You will both be brought before Newell and Huddy, with Thurlowe and myself, tonight. They will judge what to do with you."

Sleeth seemed to fall into a reverie, muttering as if to himself.

"Lay up not treasure unto yourself," he muttered.

"Oh, chuck that rot, guv'nor," said Black George impatiently. "The game's over and you've lost. Pay the stakes."

"The pearls will go back to their owners and the families of the men you have made away with, whose bones lie on Matemotu," said Boone.

Sleeth threw aside his mask and struck the Bible in sudden rage with his clenched fist.

"Some fool has babbled," he cried. "But it was not Jude. You don't know where they are. I thought Jude had blabbed. I thought Cree had told her before he died. No one knows where they are but me. They are well worth my life," he went on, lowering his voice, a cunning look creeping into his eyes. "Half of them well worth the year or so I have left. I'll strike a trade with you, Captain. My neck, it will not serve me long, against half the pearls?"

"I promise nothing," answered Boone.

"All of them, then, Captain. All of them. And the rest of the trinkets. There's—" he lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper, looking fearfully at Black George, who had returned to his game of Canfield— "there's nearly half-a-million dollars there, Captain. Half-a-million! I'll show you where they are. You can say you gave me all of them and keep half. Just to leave me alone on the island?"

Boone shook his head and turned away.

"Then the families you prate of can starve and rot!" shrieked Sleeth. "Don't be a fool, Captain. My life against the pearls. Come."

"What about mine?" asked Black George. "Eh? What about mine, guv'nor?"

"Yours, you singing fool!" snarled Sleeth in a fury. "Beg for it yourself, you cur. The pearls were mine—mine, you whining minstrel!"

Black George looked at his leader with a sinister change on his careless face, handsome despite its disfigurement of burned hair and mustache.

"Maybe I will," he said quietly and built his ten on the jack of spades.

"I'll send you some clothes as I promised," said Boone. "We'll settle the matter tonight."

"And a razor and scissors, old chap," begged Black George, as the skipper left the hold.

AT NOON the reckoning showed that the *Roamer* had sped before the monsoon far below the thirtieth degree of latitude and was now close to the direct steamer lane from Auckland to Suva, with Matemotu some six hundred miles to the north and east. The brisk wind was directly aft with the certainty of a steady breeze from the monsoon quarter, and Boone, the schooner wing-and-wing once more, making better than eight knots hour in and hour out, hoped to fetch the crater by the third night or early the morning after.

With level decks, the Roamer was overhauled and the minor damages done by the storm restored. Many hands made light work and short watches, aside from the guarding of the two pirates in the afterhold, and Boone at last found himself with comparatively little to do.

He was still chary of forcing his company upon Marion, and the girl, after one or two puzzled glances in his direction that he failed to notice or interpret, resumed her reading to Von der Mehden, who lay back in his comfortable chair watching her through half-closed eyes that missed nothing. Once or twice she lost her place after she looked up to see Boone standing at the lee rail smoking, and the German's eyes held a hidden smile. Finally she closed the magazine.

"It's a stupid story, don't you think, Mr. Von der Mehden?" she said. "I thought it was going to be interesting."

"*Ja*," assented the German, yawning behind his hand. "It is not very awakening. You could write a better one about what we've been doing. If you do not mind, I think I'll drop off again. Nothing like sleep for all sorts of headaches, Miss Newell."

He closed his eyes. The girl arose, hesitated, then with a mounting flush walked to the rail.

"Captain Boone," she said, conscious of her blush but meeting his eyes squarely, "aren't you going to let me thank you for

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what you promised that wretched woman? It was generous of you."

"I am glad it pleased you," he answered.

"Do you know that you are a very difficult person to talk to of late?" she asked him. "Especially these days, after you have buried me under all these obligations. Do you want to avoid a settlement?"

"A settlement?"

"Yes. Father tells me you expect to find out about the pearls tonight from Sleeth. You said once I was the leader of the expedition. You haven't rendered any accounting of expenses even. I don't know how deeply I may be involved. I'm beginning to feel terribly in your debt."

She spoke lightly and Boone tried to meet her tone.

"Are you anxious to pay me off then?" he asked.

Their eyes met again. Her's were dancing with a merriment he failed to grasp.

"No," she said. "But I have talked with father and perhaps you would rather discuss this with him?"

Boone shook his head.

"You are still the leader," he said.

"Well, then, we have decided that our share of the pearls should be divided into two parts, one for us and one for you. Father suggests that part of the remainder may be set aside to recompense Captain Thurlowe and the rest, but in case you don't all agree to that, we'll split our share in three and repay them for their trouble that way. That is fair, isn't it?"

"Your father can repay my expenses," said Boone, "but I did not, do not wish for any reward."

"None?" she asked, her roses blooming again in her cheeks as Boone's gaze grew more intent.

The signal was thrilling deep within him, her blushes, a something that dimmed yet deepened the luster of her eyes, the quality of the mood that seemed mutual, urged him to claim the reward his heart desired. Then his glance fell on Von der Mehden and caught the flutter of his eyelids. The thrill ceased abruptly, the mood dissolved and he felt himself suddenly a fool for having misinterpreted a girl's eyes in mistaking gratitude for love, for having thought a schooner's deck at midday the fit place for an uncertain wooing.

"There is none that I can name," he said.

Her face changed suddenly. Its softened outline seemed to grow harder. Then the dimple suddenly danced again in her cheek and the merriment that had puzzled him returned to her eyes.

"In that case," she said, "as soon as you have made up your mind exactly what you want—perhaps you had better—see father."

She left him bewildered as she hastened below, with a flirt of the white skirts she had achieved from the trade stock to replenish her wardrobe.

Boone walked toward Von der Mehden in a daze, pondering the meaning of her last words. He halted beside the deck-chair to find its occupant regarding him quizzically.

"Awake again?" queried Boone.

"*Ja.* Wide awake. You, my friend, look as if you were day-dreaming. So?"

"Your head is still buzzing, Von der Mehden."

"So. You think so. Von der Mehden? Poor Otto! He is dismissed. Dick, you are a fine skipper and a brave man, and a strong. But you haf your weak spots, my friend."

"Yes?" Boone was conscious of a growing irritation as he spoke.

"*Ja.* With all your virtues you haf one big fault. Dick, you are what they call in English a chomp."

"How's that?"

"A choomp, Dick. Perhaps I do not pronounce it exactly, but that's the word. Chomp!"

Boone felt a foolish desire to pick a quarrel with the sick man, but turned away biting his lip as he heard the German complacently humming—

Ob ich dich liebe?

Boone stayed away from Marion for the rest of the day, avoiding her later when she resumed her place with Von der Mehden. There was no more reading and their casual laughter jarred upon him, fancying himself the subject of their conversation, imagining that they were discussing his qualifications as a "chomp," which he rightly interpreted as "chump."

AFTER the evening meal, the *Roamer* seething serenely beneath the stars and the thin sickle of a new moon, the four skippers, Boone, Newell, Thurlowe and Huddy, sat in impromptu court about the cabin table, waiting for Sleeth and Black George to be brought in. Huddy was fairly his old self once more and

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I'm no leader, but I want in equable judgment. Not myself.

On two things they were already decided—to make every endeavor to secure the pearls, and, in case of success or failure, to make no compromise, but to deliver both the men over to the British authorities. Newell and Huddy were both British subjects and the piracy committed on their ships alone rendered Sleeth and his companion liable to direct punishment.

Boone, after disclosing the relationship between Jude Demoulins and Levuka Louis, readily obtained the consent of the rest to his promise.

"That's a different matter," summed up Thurlowe. "But pearls or no pearls, by the way, we've got to be careful the British bigwigs don't get their hooks on the treasure after we find 'em under pretext of 'Crown rights' or whatever they call 'em, like they did with a chunk of ambergree I found on Vanua Levu and was fool enough to brag about. Those ghosts that the poor loon we left on Matemotu thinks he talked to are not going to be laid until Sleeth's own life has paid forfeit. If we do get the pearls, what are you goin' to do with 'em, after Newell and Huddy here get theirs back?"

"Why," said Boone, "it's my idea we ought to form a trust-fund of the rest, advertise for the families of the men that have been made away with—you know most of 'em, Thurlowe, and Louis can help us with the rest—then divide it up among them according to their needs, since we'll never find out the exact amounts, in all probability—I don't suppose Sleeth has kept books—keeping out something for prize-money for all hands. How does that strike you?"

"Fine, after we get them," said Thurlowe.

Haley came in ahead of the two prisoners, who followed under guard.

"All right, Haley," said Boone. "You can leave them with us."

He ostentatiously shifted an automatic in front of him and motioned to a locker where the buccaneers seated themselves, facing the four captains, grouped about three sides of the table to form their court.

The stern gaze of their judges seemed to have little effect upon Sleeth and his comrade. Both were dressed in white ducks from the trade-room and Black George had managed to barber himself to some degree of nattiness.

Boone had offered the position of inquisitor to Newell, but the three skippers had insisted upon his assuming the office, declaring that he was the least biased and the actual head, as master of the schooner and leader of the enterprise.

Sleeth sat stolidly with set face and implacable eyes. Black George fingered his trimmed mustache with an air of unconcern.

"There is no time to be wasted in this matter, Sleeth," commenced Boone. "You offered me your life against the pearls. Both are already forfeited. The pearls were never your property. If you care to restore them, it may have some effect upon your ultimate sentence from the authorities, to whom we are resolved to deliver you. It's pretty evident that the treasure is somewhere concealed on Matemotu. Ultimately it will be discovered, with or without your help."

"You can search till the sea gives up its dead," said Sleeth, "and you will never find it. I do not ask you for my life. Give me a chance for it by leaving me on Matemotu and you can sail with the pearls.

"Judge not that ye be not judged," he went on in monotonous bass, his eyes cast upward. "There were robbers mentioned in the book that I have been reading. Had I not neglected its teachings I would not be in this position. Barabbas, there was, and two others who were shown mercy."

"This is sheer blasphemy, Sleeth," said Newell severely. "You are going to Suva to suffer for your crimes. You can make up your mind to that. It would be barely justice, and a sentence that would be well approved, if we strung you up to the main spreader. If your canting talk means anything, restore the pearls."

"So I go to Suva, do I?" asked Sleeth.

Boone affirmed his question.

"Then you may all burn in hell before I give up the pearls," he snarled with sudden fury. "Yet it is a pity—" he softened his tone—"there are many of them, and other trinkets. Almost half a million dollars. Much more than the pitiful remnant of my life is worth, far more than the chance I ask for on Matemotu."

"We've given you our final decision, Sleeth," said Boone. "Haley!"

The mate appeared.

"You can take them away," said Boone.

"I'd like to say a word or two, y' know," said Black George. "I have no bargain to

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make, but I rather fancy you'd like to hear what I've got to say."

"Go on," said Boone.

"Thanks. My esteemed pal, the guv'nor, seems to be inclined to leave me entirely out of the deal. If I remember right, he called me a 'whining minstrel' today and told me to beg for mercy on my knees. Now I'm not going to do any crawlin', but I rather fancy I can make him do some singing, even if the tune won't be to his liking. Cree didn't tell Jude where the treasure was hidden, guv'nor, but he *did* tell another woman when he was drunk, and she told the 'whining minstrel,' and he's going to tell where it jolly well is, without fear of you, old chap, or favor from these gentlemen. It's——"

SLEETH sprang to his feet with astounding nimbleness and sank his apparently nerveless fingers deep in Black George's throat, till the latter's face turned purple and his eyes started from their sockets. It took all the strength of Boone and Thurlowe to break the pirate leader's desperate grip. All the old vigor of his mammoth frame seemed to return for the moment and as suddenly ebb again, leaving him limp and flabby between the two skippers.

He spat in Black George's face as the skippers forced him apart, and sank weakly to the locker.

"You spawn!" he ejaculated. "You cowardly slime of the pit!"

Black George, solicitously feeling his neck where the marks of Sleeth's fingers showed clearly, cleared his throat, attempted to speak, and made an appealing gesture for a drink.

Boone mixed him some whisky and water, which he swallowed with eager difficulty.

"Thanks," he said, leaning against the wall of the cabin. "I think I jolly well earned it. Let me tell you a few things about this bloodthirsty gentleman who is so apt with his names. He had the strength of two men once—he gave us a little exhibition just now."

Black George ruefully felt his throat again and mutely looked at the whisky bottle.

"He was just as brave as his strength, a grown-up bully among a lot of cowards who had landed where they were in his crowd because they were more afraid of hard work than anything else. Oh, I was one of them. I'm a proper blackguard harder. Then [illegible] edge it. But Sleeth threw in [illegible] what you Americans call a bluff. Give him the whip-hand and he was a good driver. He handled us all nicely until Cree came along. Herded us like cattle and branded us with his private mark."

He turned back his sleeve and showed the tattoo of the skull with the bone between its teeth.

"You won't find it on him," he went on. "He was always figuring on leaving us in the lurch some time and scooting with the lion's share of the loot. Precious little we got. But he didn't want us to get away. With this brand advertised all over the South Seas, there wasn't a chance for any poor devil to quit and earn an honest living. Not that many of us wanted to. It was a merry life enough. But Sleeth would have dug out long ago, only Cree joined. He was a proper man, Cree was. He was your master, and you knew it." He turned on Sleeth, limp on the locker. "He called your bluff. You were not as strong as you used to be and you were a little bit afraid of cracking your whip too much. And we knew it. Cree was our man.

"Sleeth's main hold was knowing where the treasure was hidden. He was always promising to divide it up, but he never meant to, and the night your schooner came in Cree and the most of us who had joined him called Sleeth for a showdown. He came through and told Cree the secret. Told it straight too, for he knew what would happen to him if he lied to Cree. Cree was to have been leader, and one to follow. We were goin' to put the guv'nor there on Matemotu where he'd left the men he robbed—we robbed, if you like—to starve, because he didn't have the nerve to kill them.

"Then you showed up and Cree got killed, on account of a woman. That was Cree's weak point, he had three of them for that matter: wine, woman and song—the old story. He would never have called me a 'whining minstrel.' He was drunk that night. All of us were, more or less, or we wouldn't have blundered on to those infernal stakes you set in the creek, which was a smart trick, at that.

"I wasn't so drunk as some of them, a hard head is the only inheritance I haven't been cut off from, and I got a girl who was fond of me to play Delilah to Cree's Samson.

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I'm no leader, but I wanted a good share of that loot myself. I'm too lazy to crack the whip or I wouldn't be where I am, but I sometimes use my head, and here's the key to Sleeth's treasure-house."

He broke off suddenly.

"You'd better look after the guv'nor," he said. "He's goin' to have a stroke. Always thought he'd go off that way with that neck of his. Had one once before. They're goin' to have a hard time hanging him. Better let him go this way."

Sleeth's head, congested with blood, rolled on the fat column of his vein-swollen neck. His eyes still held their venomous stare, but his fingers worked convulsively as he labored for breath.

They laid him on the floor, still glaring with set eyes, in which consciousness appeared to linger, loosened the collar of his shirt and dashed water into his face. Haley came in at Boone's call and Sleeth was carried into the trade-room, which opened out of the main cabin.

"Harris is a bit of a doctor," suggested Black George. "One of the men that came over to you. Little red-headed Whitechapel Jew. He handled him the last time he had one of those fits. That is, if you are anxious to save him for gallows meat," he added callously.

Boone gave instructions for the renegade to be sent for to aid in Sleeth's recovery and resumed his seat at the table.

"Not much bluff about his sickness," he said to Black George, "and there wasn't much bluff about his blowing up the *Ghost*."

"He jumped, didn't he?" answered the pirate. "Gave himself a good start over the rest of us. Got right up in the bows. I don't say he's not dangerous. Dogs bark often enough, but they bite too. Now, about the treasure."

"We can not guarantee you any immunity, you know," said Boone.

"Don't you worry about that end of it. I've come to the last of my string. No one to lament me. Not goin' to do any lamentin' myself. Got to stand by my own words, what?

Though we die in our shoes, with our neck in a noose,
We've only ourselves to blame.

"I've made a proper mess of it all 'round," he went on, "but I've had a fairly good time. Got to pay the bill."

If it was bravado, it was excellently well done, and the four men could not repress an involuntary feeling of admiration for the man, hardened though they were in their determination to deliver him over to justice.

Thurlowe poured out another drink and pushed it across the table. Black George accepted it gratefully.

"That's sporting of you," he said. "Now for business. You have to stand directly above the spar that's set in the cliff by the landing at Matemotu. Know it? Then face the crater, walk thirty paces along the rim to the right. Look across the crater for the skull. That's some sort of a lava formation, I fancy, I've never noticed it. You can only see it from this position in early morning sunlight when the shadows are right. Just below it are a lot of fissures in the rock, straight up and down.

"The junk is buried somewhere in the floor of one of these caves. They all join each other in a kind of labyrinth. You can tell the right one by the water dripping in it and a pool of sour water a little way inside. If the guv'nor comes 'round, better take him along. It may save you a lot of poking about. So there you are."

He drained his glass.

"I hate to be a hog," he said. "But have you got a spare cigar?"

Boone took half a dozen from the box they had been using and went to the trade-room door.

"Have this man taken back, will you, Haley," he said, and passed in to where Sleeth lay stretched on the display table.

One of the five renegades, an English Jew named Harris, a shifty-eyed individual with a spoon chin, was bending over him, trying to force some whisky between the tightly closed teeth. Sleeth still breathed stertorously, but his face had regained some of its natural color.

"Better leave 'im 'ere tonight, sir," said Harris. "Hit's a stroke. 'E's 'ad 'em before. 'E'll come hout hof hit hall right hafter a bit, mebbe a hour hor two, but 'e'll not be hup to much before morning."

Boone felt Sleeth's pulse and turned back his eyelids. The balls were uprolled, the whites suffused with blood, and the pulse pumped with feeble jerks.

"I hold you five responsible for him," he said, addressing Harris and his four comrades, who were sitting by their makeshift bunks on the long counters.

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"Aye, aye, sir," they answered, echoed by Harris. "Hall right, sir, we'll look hafter 'im."

"Call me or Mr. Haley as soon as he comes to himself," ordered Boone as he returned to the main cabin. The captains had left and Black George had been taken back to the hold.

WHEN Boone went on deck he found Marion alone at the stern, watching the shining wake. Von der Mehden left her as Boone came up, and went forward, humming. Boone's first impulse was retreat, but the girl nodded and made a place for him at her side.

"You let your patient keep late hours," he said.

"Von der Mehden? He's doing capitally. Looking forward to the end of our adventuring is doing him good."

"Are you looking forward to the end of it, too?"

"Why not?"

There seemed no appropriate answer he could think of, and he remained silent.

"Were you successful?" asked Marion presently. "About the pearls, I mean. I haven't seen father since he went below."

"Yes. Black George has told us where they are hidden in a cave on Matemotu. We'll be digging for them at sunrise on Thursday, I hope."

"Thursday! It seems strange to talk again about the days of the week. We seem to have been out of the world of clocks and calendars, though of course your chronometers have had to do their duty. What's today?"

"Monday. Do you realize it's only ten days since we walked on the beach at Levuka?"

She turned her head toward him in the darkness.

"It hardly seems possible," she said softly.

All sorts of impulses jumbled together in Boone's brain. To tell her the time had passed all too quickly, to say he felt that he had known her for years—both of which apparently paradoxical statements were true—to tell her he wished the trip would never end but they might go on sailing together forever; to take her in his arms and make her own she loved him, through the sheer fervor of his own desire to have her and to hold her as sweetheart and wife through all the years to come. All these surged within him till he felt himself leaning toward her, words thronging to his lips as he looked into her upturned face in the starlight, ivory pale, deep gray eyes whose color he could not distinguish but knew so well, little glints of pale gold in the hair of her dainty head.

Then, as the scent of a cigar was blown faintly to them, came the sudden reversal, the remembrance of Von der Mehden standing where he now stood, of his own comparative poverty, of the German's wealth and the girl's own heritage, about to be added to through Black George's disclosure.

He steadied himself, and the girl, swaying a little, turned her gaze seaward again with a little sigh.

"Will you go direct to Suva," she asked in a little while, "after Matemotu?"

"Yes. Are we to say good-by there?"

"I don't know. We could go home by the steamer to Auckland, of course. I thought father wanted you to run down to his island for the rest of the pearls, unless it's getting too late in the season."

"Pretty late for rotting out. The rains will be coming soon. He did mention it. I understand there's only a comparatively small patch left, though he expects it to be rich. Would you go?"

"Perhaps," she hurried on before Boone could speak, "Mr. Von der Mehden is anxious to get to Suva. He's expecting important mail from home, you know."

"Yes?"

"Hadn't he told you? I thought you knew. He's going to be married as soon as he gets back to Germany—to the loveliest girl! He showed me her photograph. I'm going to write to her, for him. Of course he can't, with his wounded hand."

All the constellations seemed to Boone to rush together in a blaze of glory. He was his own man once more.

"Marion," he said. "If——"

"There's father," she said quickly, and Boone fancied there was more than a tinge of disappointment, even annoyance, in her voice. "Have you spoken to him yet, about the reward?"

"No," said Boone. "I've decided not to mention the matter until after we leave Matemotu. Then I'm going to take it up with you."

The three captains bore down upon them

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and Marion took an early opportunity to escape. Boone looked into Von der Mehden's cabin, which he shared with Bockstatt, before he turned in himself. The engineer was snoring rhythmically and Von der Mehden was reading in his bunk. They chatted for a few minutes. Then Boone said casually—

"By the way, Otto, you never told me you were engaged."

"Is that so, Dick? I meant to. Like to see her picture?"

Boone looked and admired.

"You've been taking pretty stiff chances," he said. "If I'd known you were going to be married, you wouldn't have been shipped. Good night, old chap."

"How about yourself, Dick?" asked Otto with a twinkle. "Good night, old chomp."

ALL the next day Sleeth remained in a stupor. It was evening when Harris finally sent word that the buccaneer was conscious once more. Boone found Sleeth in a comfortable chair, usually reserved for trading chiefs, apparently himself again. Three of the five renegades were above on duty, but Harris and the other man seemed to wait upon their ex-leader with a fawning deference that Boone did not altogether relish.

"Feeling better?" he asked Sleeth not too sympathetically.

"Patched up, sir, patched up," answered the pirate in a weak voice. "I'm pretty well broken down, Captain Boone," he whined in a tone strange to his ordinarily booming bass.

He lifted an arm from his knee with an effort and let it drop heavily. His jaw sagged, his mouth was drawn at the corners and moved in a noiseless mumble when he ceased to talk. His eyes were almost lost between the fat creases of his brows and the puffy pouches beneath. One hand picked at the cloth on his knee.

Attitude and action denoted a feeble, senile old man, yet Boone sensed again the presence of a mask, a warning of danger, as from a maimed and trapped tiger, waiting patiently hour after hour for its captor to come within striking distance. He was not inclined to entirely accept Black George's estimate of the man. Whatever of weakness lay in Sleeth he set to the account of age, not any lack of courage. Black George's speech had been, not unnaturally, tinctured with venom. In this his fellow captains agreed with him.

"Sleeth is a scotched snake," Thurlowe had said. "Dangerous until he's dead, and I'd let him lie a long time before I made certain of that. Ever see a pizen snake's fangs strike after his head was whipped off?"

Boone resolved to handle the pirate leader with care until he was off his hands.

"I was nearly taken, Captain," went on Sleeth. "Truly it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' A sorry hulk you'll deliver to justice, sir. I feel that I shall not live for the trial. But you have been kind. If I could only have my Bible. There is joy over a repentant sinner. Do not scoff," he added as he caught the look on Boone's face. "I have been on the border and seen death face to face as I lay here. The scales have fallen from my eyes. I would clear my deck as best I may before going into port."

Boone listened disgustedly, his subconscious senses still warning him, as he noted the narrowed jade eyes steady between their puckering slits, at strange variance to the flaccid face and trembling frame.

"I'm no priest, Sleeth," he said. "You'll find your Bible back in the afterhold."

"He ain't fit to be moved, sir," put in Harris.

"That will do my man," said Boone. "Remember you're not altogether at top rating yourself yet. Tell Mr. Haley I'm ready for Sleeth to go back to the hold."

The man slunk off with a sidelong glance at Sleeth, and Boone continued:

"Black George has told us all about the cave with the pool, Sleeth. We know the treasure is somewhere buried in the floor. I'm going to take you with us. As long as we are bound to find it, you can show your repentance by saving us some digging. It will make a difference in your treatment while you are aboard, too."

"Willingly, Captain Boone, willingly. I tell you I am a changed man. I believe the rush of blood to my brain has cleared something away. I have read of such things. I will prove my good faith and show you the spot. The pearls are in a teak box, with other things and money. I will prove my good-will once more. I will open it for you. There is death in the lid. It is well guarded. Death, above the pearls!" He disclosed a momentary glimpse of opening eyes that seemed to glow with lambent flame. "But I will open it for you in safety."

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"Don't try any tricks, Sleeth. Not anything like the blowing up of the *Ghost* for instance."

Sleeth covered his face with his hands.

"I was mad when I did that. I must have surely been mad, captain. No, no, Captain! There is only death for one—one who is careless. But I shall be careful. You shall see. There will be no danger for you. Black George and I will dig it up together. He will do the lifting, for it is heavy and I am weak. Then I will open it. You can stay outside if you like, and I will bring it to you. Half a million dollars in luster pearls, in trinkets and gold coins. A king's ransom. A great restitution."

"A bit tardy," said Boone grimly. "Make sure it's genuine, as far as it goes. Ah, Haley! Better keep them separate, I think. Put Black George in the forehold. Keep some one watching both of them. And Sleeth won't need Harris any more."

"I thank you," said Sleeth humbly. "I shall feel safer. Black George may bear me a grudge. I deserve it. But now I shall be alone in peace to read and learn much that I should have learned long ago."

He rose to his feet totteringly as Haley called in the man detailed to guard him.

"Pah!" said Boone as he and his mate entered the main cabin. "The man sickens me. He's a mass of hypocrisy. Keep those five chaps away from him. I don't trust them overmuch."

"Nor me," said Haley. "That Harris is a bad one, clean through."

During the next day the landing party was arranged for Matemotu, then a scant two hundred miles distant. Huddy, healthy minded and active once again in the company of his fellows, still felt a strong aversion to the place and had no desire to revisit it, but Marion begged hard to accompany her father and see the place where he had been imprisoned.

Somewhat against his will, Boone consented, and places in the boat were set apart for her, Captain Newell, himself, and Ong Chuck, to cajole the Other One aboard the schooner. Boone held no particular desire to hand the Other One over to justice, neither did he fancy leaving him alone with his ghosts upon the lonely crater to gradually become a maniac.

Von der Mehden elected to remain aboard, feeling his dizziness a bar to the trip up the rope and subsequent climbing. Boone decided to use his own boys at the oars in his mistrust of Harris and his comrades, whom he suspected of still being too much under the influence of Sleeth to be chanced on the trip. He had no desire to risk the slightest possibility of a slip in this winding up of the voyage, neither did he purpose making a picnic of the final visit to Matemotu, and decided, against all requests, that the one boat would be sufficient, with the three captains and Ong Chuck well armed with automatics to handle the two prisoners.

In the new understanding he felt now existed between Marion and himself his hopes ran high as he checked off reckonings with Thurlowe at noon, and pricked off the position of the *Roamer* on the chart, a hundred and thirty miles south and east of Matemotu, the weather logged as fair and a following wind full and steady in the stretching sails.

CHAPTER X

THE END OF THE QUEST

THE mounting sun was chasing the stars from the sky, as a pickerel scatters a shoal of minnows. The aroma of Ong Chuck's coffee arose like grateful incense. Boone, by the wheel in the morning dusk, was joined by a lithe little figure, gray in the half-light one moment, rose-radiant the next in the first glance of the sun god, who seemed to have timed his arrival to greet it.

The level beam searched the face of Marion Newell, smiled audaciously into her eyes until the white lids sank in defense against his shafts, turned a searching light on her hair and pronounced it pure gold, kissed the fresh red lips, caressed the firm young throat, and, finding all flawless, passed on to severer duties.

When Marion reopened her dazzled eyes, she found Boone gazing at her with an ardor, more human, but as intense as that of Phœbus himself. Her blush matched the hue of a little, rosy, out-all-night cloud, high in the zenith, caught by Watchman Day.

"I'm on time, you see," she said. "You promised we'd be in sight of Matemotu at sunrise."

"There it is," answered Boone, pointing to starboard. "Come forward, we can see it better."

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They walked to the cathead, hidden from the deck in a little world of their own by the screen of the hauling headsails. Flying-fish in lustrous blue and silver livery leaped in the sunrise. Dolphins scattered flakes of molten gold as they pursued in a deadly chase, that, in the primrose and hyacinth dawn, seemed only a playful game of tag. The tragedies occurred out of sight, below the surface. Two miles ahead, and to starboard, a blue mound, flecked with purple shadows, lay upon the sea.

"That's Matemotu," said Boone.

Marion gazed at it earnestly.

"It looks like a great turtle, doesn't it?" she said. "Or an enchanted isle fresh risen from the sea. Yet you say the crater holds the bones of hundreds left there to slow starvation. Matemotu! The Island of the Dead! Horrible!"

"It's not a pleasant place to visit," suggested Boone. "I wish you'd give up your idea of going."

"I want to see the place where father was sick and imprisoned," she protested. "Besides, you promised. Why do you always persist in treating me as if I were an everyday, make-a-fuss-over-me girl?"

Boone's look was an eloquent answer, and she went on hastily.

"I want to visit the graves of those poor captains, too," she said. "What are you going to do about them?"

"We've talked that over. We'll send back and bring them to Suva or Levuka for proper burial. I don't want their bones aboard with us. I want it to be a pleasure trip back to Viti Levu," he said meaningly.

Marion flushed again and didn't seem to mind it.

"Have you found it terribly hard," she asked, "to realize all the terrible things that have happened? I can't. Of course you spared me the sight of most of it, but it all seems as if I had read about it or dreamed it."

"I'm thankful for that. I don't think about it more than I can help, but, now that the actual excitement is over, it all seems fairly real. You see I saw it."

"Of course," she shuddered a little. "It must have been frightful. Sleeth burning his ship, and then the killing of all those savages. Thank you for sending me below. It was bad enough there. I thought the schooner was blown up. I can't forget, though, the sending of all those men and women into eternity without warning. What sort of a monster is Sleeth? Father thinks he is insane."

"More cunning than insane, I'm inclined to think. Yet, after all, his act was more merciful than the law would have been, though he was thinking of his own motives just then, I fancy. He's mad to some extent, but the line between his cunning and his madness is a slight one. As to the savages, we had to protect ourselves, and you. But we're through with all of that now. We'll have the pearls within an hour or so and then we're homeward bound for Happy Harbor."

A clamor on a gong disturbed them.

"Ong Chuck getting impatient," he said. "We'll get the boat off as soon as we've had breakfast. Fresh flying-fish, hot biscuits, coffee and marmalade. How's your appetite? Curiously enough I don't seem to have lost mine."

"Why should you?" she asked mischievously.

Boone looked at her with a twinkle matching her own in his brown eyes, his eyebrows raised a trifle, and he made a little movement toward her.

"Oh!" she said, rose-red once more, and fled.

Boone followed her smilingly.

"I'll make Otto take back that 'chomp' before the day's over," he said to himself, wondering somewhat at the assurance of happiness that possessed him.

IT WAS six o'clock when the whaleboat left the schooner, swiftly rowed over the dancing sea by the native boys. Sleeth and Black George, who seemed to show no enmity against his leader, were set in the bows, Ong Chuck, armed with knife and pistol, between them, a grim, effective warder. Both the buccaneers had been searched for arms—Boone in his suspicions of Harris, or rather of Sleeth's ascendancy over the renegades, deciding to take no chances. Black George smoked one of the cigars Boone had given him overnight with as much serenity as if the occasion were a pleasure excursion organized in his benefit.

Marion, trim in white duck, sat between her father and Thurlowe in the stern. Boone handled the steering-oar. Besides the automatics of the four men, Marion herself carried one of smaller caliber, slung

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in a holster suspended across one shoulder.

"I'll be as much of a man as I can," she told Boone laughingly, as he filled her clips with cartridges before they left the schooner.

He had looked at her, wondering at the transformation the coarse stock of the trade-room had received at her hands. Out of the cheap duck she had achieved a middy blouse that caressed her rounded figure and disclosed an adorable little V at her throat. Boone made up his mind there and then to kiss it at the earliest opportunity, if his interview after the recovery of the pearls turned out as he hoped it would.

A blue handkerchief was tied in a sailor's knot—which is also a true lovers' knot, smoothly joined, evenly balanced. The short skirt hung jauntily midway to narrow arching insteps and ankles not to be matched, south of Capricorn at any rate. A sailor's canvas hat had received jauntiness and style from some feminine twist of the fingers. The native sailors gazed in open admiration. Von der Mehden, at the rail, waving his left hand in greeting, whispered to Boone, who was giving final instructions to Haley.

"If I wasn't going to be married, Dick, I'd try and cut you out."

Ong Chuck was first ashore, herding Sleeth and Black George against the cliff while the rest landed. The boat was secured again to the iron rings, one native fending clear while the others prepared to haul on the tackle that still swung from the spar. Boone and Ong Chuck ascended first and received the buccaneers. Then came Marion in the bo'sun's chair, followed by her father and Thurlowe, the sailors staying below.

In the same order they climbed the track to the summit and stood on the edge of the crater, the wind blowing fresh about them, making tiny pennants of the tendrils of the girl's hair where it escaped from the jaunty hat, the desolate crater-bowl below them.

The trade-clouds swam in a sky that was but a shade less deep than the sea beyond the reef, sea-birds wheeled, joined every moment by others from the bowl of the crater till the air was full of them, planing bright-eyed and unafraid, almost within handgrasp. The gullet of the crater, crusted with the ashes and clinkers of its dead fires, lay in heavy shadow, somber, desolate.

BOONE looked toward the cave where they had found Captain Newell and the Other One. The fire smoked no longer, but the box in which they had brought the food had vanished.

"There's my cell, Marion," said Newell. "We can get a better view of it over this way. Later you can go into it, if you want to. It's not much of a show-place."

"The whole place is dreadful," she answered as they walked a little apart, Boone with them. "It's a mortuary." She shivered in the bright sunlight, thinking of the skeletons within the caves whose mouths showed black in the purple shadow. "And to think, daddy-chum," she went on, "you might have been here till you were—like the rest—if it hadn't been for Dick."

She held out one hand to her father, another to Boone, and the three stood for a moment united in happy presage, thought Boone, thrilling with the "Dick" of many long years to come.

"We mustn't forget Louis," he said. "It must have cost him something to tell me the position of the island, knowing we would be likely at any moment to discover what he has always concealed, the fact of his sister being identified with Sleeth."

"I hope he'll do what she asks," said Marion. "I really believe she's sorry. Do you think he will?"

"I do," said Boone confidently. "There's more heart to Louis than most people give him credit for. But we'd better be getting busy. There's no sign of the Other One. His fire's out, but I suppose he's been finding cold canned grub an agreeable change from sea-gull. He's probably been watching us, recognized Sleeth and gone into hiding. He doesn't realize Sleeth is a prisoner. We'll get Ong Chuck to look him up later."

They went back to the others. Sleeth, who had been silent all morning, turned to Boone.

"You'll go straight across, Captain?" he asked, an eager note in his voice, apparently anxious to get through with the affair. "There's the place."

He pointed to some clefts in the opposite wall.

"Where's your skull?" asked Thurlowe.

"You'll have to walk the thirty paces," said Black George. "Got to get the sun just right. Want to see it? Rather interestin' formation. Quite natural. Sort of

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trade-mark of the shop, y' know. I've never seen it, but I've heard them talk about it on Eremanga."

Boone looked at Marion, who nodded. They walked westward along the uneven rim, Black George, counting off the strides, leading. Behind him walked Ong Chuck, knife in one hand, patting the curving blade with the other as if more than willing to use it. Two crowbars were tucked beneath one arm. Sleeth came next with Thurlowe behind him, his pistol ready for any desperate move. Sleeth walked with dragging steps, his whole body expressing utter weariness.

"Thirty!" procalimed Black George, halting and facing the bowl. "There you are. Right opposite. Curious. What?"

Marion gave a little cry of wonder, echoed by the others. A great mass of lava stood out from the cindery slope, some fifty feet from the irregularly notched rim of the caldera. The eastern sun, now mounted above the crater, struck sharply on its bosses and cavities, showing the striking semblance of a gigantic skull, fire sculptured in high relief. All the grim details were plain, the smooth cranium, the projecting under jaw, gloomy eye-sockets, sunken hollows for the cheek-gaps, a triangular pit for the nose, a ghastly rent for the mouth, in which showed horribly suggestions of crumbling teeth. It was the symbol of Matemotu, as Black George had put it, "the trade-mark of the shop," the sign of the Island of the Dead.

Below showed the vertical rifts, in one of which the pirate leader had hidden his ill-gained hoard.

Marion swayed a trifle, covering her eyes. Boone passed his arm about her shoulders.

"I'll be all right in just a second," she said, trying to smile. "Let's look the other way for a moment. You see, I'm only a girl after all."

They went slowly down the slope, deep with fine ash that turned up sulphur-hued to the foot. As they descended the gristly mockery of the skull changed shape, fading back into the cliff to a misshapen block of lava.

They passed through the colonies of protesting gulls and crossed the bottom of the bowl, set sparsely with crackling clumps of bushes, dried and dead, as became the place, ascending the slope before them till they stood on a little level in front of the tall fissures, narrow, jagged-edged from the gases that had torn them open.

"Which one, Sleeth?" asked Boone.

The buccaneer, who had staggered up the cliff in apparent exhaustion, pointed at the central fissure, flanked on either side by two others.

"Remember, there's death in the lid," he said. "Who's coming in? Or shall we bring it to you?"

"We'll go with you," answered Boone, and thought he saw fleeting disappointment in Sleeth's eyes. "Cng Chuck, go ahead with a torch. Sleeth, you and Black George follow. I've got you covered, remember, with eight shots in my automatic, and another torch. No tricks. Captain Thurlowe follows me. Captain Newell, you'll stay with your daughter?"

"Can't I go too?" asked Marion.

Boone shook his head.

"No," he said firmly. "You heard what he said. You'll stay outside. We'll bring out the pearls."

The girl made a little *moue* of protest.

"I thought I was the leader," she said.

"Not now," answered Boone. "You've resigned."

"Not yet," she said, but her eyelids dropped under his gaze.

"That's right, Boone," applauded Newell. "You'll have to learn to take orders, honey."

THE five entered the narrow cavern, cold with moist air. The torches illumined the ragged walls and shone on water that slowly trickled from the roof and dripped from points of lava. Dark openings gaped here and there. The place seemed honeycombed. A hundred feet in, the passage curved and sloped downward to a little pool, stinking of sulphur. Thurlowe dropped the crowbars Ong Chuck had carried and they fell with a clang on the flinty floor.

"Go to work, Sleeth," ordered Boone. "No tricks."

With Ong Chuck holding both torches, Boone and Thurlowe standing ready to fire at the first hint of treachery, the two pirates took up the iron bars, and, wading in the shallow water, began to probe under Sleeth's direction.

"Where first, my gallant leader?" asked Black George. "Here? Right-o!"

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He began to sing, his voice resonant in the little chamber.

"Every gem is a brave man's life,
Each coin a drop of his gore;
Every pearl is the tear of a wife,
Yo ho, for the glittering store!"

Sleeth stopped probing the bottom of the pool.

"Dig, you chanting fool," he said.

"What? Silence under the skull? As you like. Hullo! Here it is."

He bent down, groping in the ooze.

"Here's a handle," he cried. "Got your's, guv'nor?"

Between them they lifted a heavy box, slimy, encrusted with salts, and set it down beside the pool. Sleeth straightened up with a groan and a sigh.

"Half a million or more," he said. "Better leave it. There's a curse on it."

Boone and Thurlowe bent to look more closely. The chest was of hardwood, black with age and exposure, bound with heavy iron. On the lid, deeply carved, was the design of the skull with the bone between its teeth, and the words—

SLEETH, HIS MARK

"That's the curse," said Boone. "We'll chance that. Open it—carefully!"

They stepped behind a buttress of the rock, their guns trained on the two buccaneers, half expecting the explosion of some infernal machine that would bring the walls about them.

"Suppose he blow up?" said Ong Chuck. "Goodbi'."

"Only death for one," repeated Sleeth. "Bear on that stud," he snarled at Black George. "Hard!" He pressed on the head of another bolt.

There was a whirr and a creak. The heavy lid snapped back. Sleeth, with lightning agility, thrust his hand into the chest. Something flashed in the blent circle of the rays from Ong Chuck's torches, and Black George sank to his knees, clutching at his breast.

Boone and Thurlowe fired simultaneously, emptying their magazine-clips at Sleeth. Ong Chuck dropped one torch and sprang forward with his knife. The bullets thwacked into the heavy wood, the reports rattled in a hundred echoes and the place was filled with the acrid smell of smokeless powder.

Sleeth had disappeared—gone like a fleeting shadow into one of the dozen openings that grinned at them on either side.

Black George lay gasping at their feet. In a widening crimson stain on the bosom of his shirt the handle of a knife still quivered. His mouth opened, quivered as if about to speak and the jaw dropped. The eyes glazed, staring horribly. One arm lay about the chest, where the light diffused a milky radiance from a tray where a cluster of shimmering pearls showed, surrounded by a medley of tarnished jewelry, a sparkle of jewels gleaming here and there from the tangle.

The three looked at each other confusedly for a moment. Ong Chuck moved toward the chest and Thurlowe knelt to place a hand above Black George's quiet heart.

"Back to the entrance. Hurry!" cried Boone, stricken with a sudden dread.

They stumbled through the passage to meet Marion and her father hastening in.

The girl ran to Boone with a little cry, and he caught her in his arms.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

"Thank God!" she whispered back.

"We've got to get back to the schooner," he said. "That devil knew what he was doing. He may have weapons *cached* in there somewhere."

They hurried from the cave, Ong Chuck lingering, grumbling at leaving the chest.

"Hang the pearls!" cried Boone. "Come on. We'll get them later."

As the Chinaman reluctantly joined them on the little plateau, a hail came from above them. They looked up apprehensively.

Sleeth, a rifle at his shoulder, stood outlined against the sky, above the lava mass that formed the skull, some two hundred and fifty feet higher than the level on which they stood.

"Ah!" he shouted. "Throw up your hands. Don't try to shoot. I've got the range of ye. Up! Up with them, or I'll start in with the girl."

"We can't reach him," groaned Boone, raging.

"Now, you brave man-hunters," shouted Sleeth. "The deal's in my hands. I'm a bluff, am I? Ask Black George if I'm a bluff now. You girl, throw your gun away. Throw it! Throw it! Now, take the others and throw them after it. Lively, or I'll make a mash of your slick lover's head.

"Stay where you are, you yellow cur!" he

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yelled at Ong Chuck, who was cautiously shifting his feet, bending his hips for a sudden spring to cover. Take his knife, too, my lady."

He shifted his rifle to the hollow of his arm, the discomfited men standing helpless, Marion, pale but facing steadily upward, between Boone and her father.

The pirate seemed transformed. His assumed weakness had been shaken off and he raged above them, on the rim of the crater.

"Thought Sleeth was played out, didn't you?" he cried. "Thought he was old and toothless, ready to be led to the gallows like a dog on a leash. You came to the old wolf's lair and you found him ready for you." His voice mounted in a gale of ferocity. "Do you know what I'm going to do to you? In one of those caves there's what's left of a dozen better men than you are, a heap of bones under the skull. Sleeth's Mark!"

He snarled down, spitting at them.

"Maybe I'll put you there after a while. I'm going to let you bleach first, when the gulls have got through with you. Come, I'll give you a chance to beg for your lives. On your knees. Then I'm going to pick you off, one at a time. Don't try to rush, or the girl goes first—" he threw his rifle to his shoulder— "I don't intend to kill her yet, unless I have to. I may find use for her as a hostage.

"Do you know what happens when this rifle goes off? There's going to be something stirring on your schooner, Captain Boone. Harris is my man yet. You young fool! It may be my schooner after all. And there's another card you've overlooked. The *Crest of the Wave* is due. They'll bring her here when they find my message at Eremanga.

"Kneel, you fools, kneel! Say your prayers, Captain Newell. You're first. You don't escape this trip. Pray, you skulking——"

He saw something in the upturned faces. Boone had started to tell him of the wreck of the *Crest of the Wave*, but refrained, preferring to die, if he must, in silence. His hand reached out to meet Marion's when he saw a figure rise up behind Sleeth.

The pirate glanced over his shoulder, wavered in his aim and suddenly shrieked, as a lean arm was thrown about his middle and another, ending in a twisted hand and wrist, stole about his neck. The rifle fell to the ground at the shock of the unexpected attack and the two figures strove for mastery on the brink of the cliff.

"It's the Other One," cried Boone. "Come on!"

MARION, faint in the revulsion of safety, was caught in her father's arms as Boone and Thurlowe clambered upward, skirting the side of the great skull, clinging precariously for hand and foot hold.

As they reached the top of the lava outcrop and stood for a second on the smooth dome of the skull before the last rush, Sleeth toppled to his knees, the hook-like wrist still sunk deep into his fleshy neck, helpless, his face contorted and discolored, while the Other One dragged him slowly backward.

"Do you know who this is?" the Other One cried, tugging desperately, heedless of his own safety. "You thought I was afraid of you—and I was. You kicked the soul out of Jean Demoulins once and left his body here to rot.

"But my soul came back!" He jerked the choking pirate closer to the rim. "The ghosts told me not to be afraid.

"Let me alone," he screamed as Boone neared the struggling pair. "He's mine. Ah, you would!"

He had relaxed the grip of his claw ever so slightly and Sleeth's arm shot upward in a final effort. Demoulins lost his balance on the crumbling *tufa* and they fell, writhing for a second on the lip of the crater wall.

Boone and Thurlowe reached the cliff-top to see them whirling, sliding with frightful momentum down the steep slope. Still locked, they rebounded from the face of a precipice that fell sheer to the sea and dropped like a plummet into the surf.

"Demoulins," said Boone. "Jude's husband! No use telling her about this. She thinks he's dead."

"He is," said Thurlowe laconically. "So's Sleeth. Black George was wrong. He was born to be drowned, after all, unless that chap choked him first with that hook of his."

He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"I hope that's the end of it, Boone. I'm sick of it. Next time I'll follow the advice Menzies gave us, and stay home. I've had all the excitement I need to last me."

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"The same here," said Boone. "Poor Campbell's the only one we have to regret, though. The rest got what they deserved. Let's go down. Where's Ong Chuck?"

They found the Chinaman sitting outside the cave on the chest. He had picked up the guns and his knife and grinned at them.

Marion had recovered and they started back.

"Come on, Ong Chuck," said Boone. "We'll send back for that."

"Betteh I stop along tleasure," said the Chinaman. "Maybe, Sleeth, he come back. Bimeby you send Kanaka."

"You're not going to turn pirate again yourself, are you?" asked Thurlowe.

Ong Chuck grinned again.

"Pilate busness he no good" he said. "Lele while plenty fun, bimeby."

He stretched his neck to an imaginary rope and drew a phantom knife across it.

"Me want live long time yet," he said.

At the trail head they saw the *Roamer* serenely coming about. A figure waved from the stern in response to Boone's shout. Below, the native boys sat on the rock landing, fending off the whaleboat with their feet, chatting carelessly.

"It's Haley," announced Boone. "Harris evidently didn't materialize. I'll attend to those chaps later. All right below."

"Any trouble on board, Haley?" he asked as they gained the deck.

Haley stared.

"How did you guess that?" he asked. "Nothing to amount to anything. Harris and the rest of his precious bunch were getting excited over something forward and Sanders figured they were going to start something. He found a gun on Harris and the rest had knives. So I stowed them away in the hold, with something to remember me by. They're a rotten crowd. Hanging's too good for them."

"I agree with you," said Boone. "The boat's going ashore for Ong Chuck and the loot. Send them with it. Haul them up and leave them on the island. They'll be there any time they're wanted."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied Haley. "I'll see the beauties ashore myself."

THE treasure glittered on the cabin table. The pearls had been admiringly passed from hand to hand and roughly appraised. There were over four hundred of them, round and oval, all shades from blue-white to pink and black, all sizes, including a dozen kingly gems, all perfect.

Sleeth had been a connoisseur. Some of the pieces of jewelry were engraved, and these were set aside as the owners were identified or guessed at. The chest beneath the tray had been filled with rouleaux of gold coins, British, French and American, to the value of sixty thousand dollars.

After Newell and Huddy had set aside the value of their losses, recognizing some of the pearls, a rough estimate put the value of the remainder at close to four hundred thousand dollars. This was to be placed in trust of Newell, with Boone and Huddy, for restitution to the families of the missing men, under the plan proposed by Boone.

"We'll deduct triple pay for every man from this," suggested Newell, "with proportionate shares from a tenth of the entire amount as prize-money. If that's agreeable to all?"

"Surely," said Thurlowe, "and the quieter all hands keep the better. Now we've no prisoners to deliver there's no need shouting about it. We don't want the Britishers chucking the whole thing into Chancery, or whatever they call it. We got it, and we'll do the distributing."

"That goes," said Huddy. And the council broke up.

"Dick," said Newell, as they went on deck together, "I want to have a private talk with you about a proper recompense for all you've done."

"Thank you," said Boone, looking to the after rail where a figure was standing, the sight of which set him athrill with longing. "If you don't mind, I'll talk that matter over with Marion."

Later—much later—some one knocked at the door of Boone's cabin. It was Von der Mehden, in resplendent pajamas.

"Dick," he said, extending his sound arm, "I take that back."

"What, Otto?" asked Boone abstractedly.

"That 'chomp.' "

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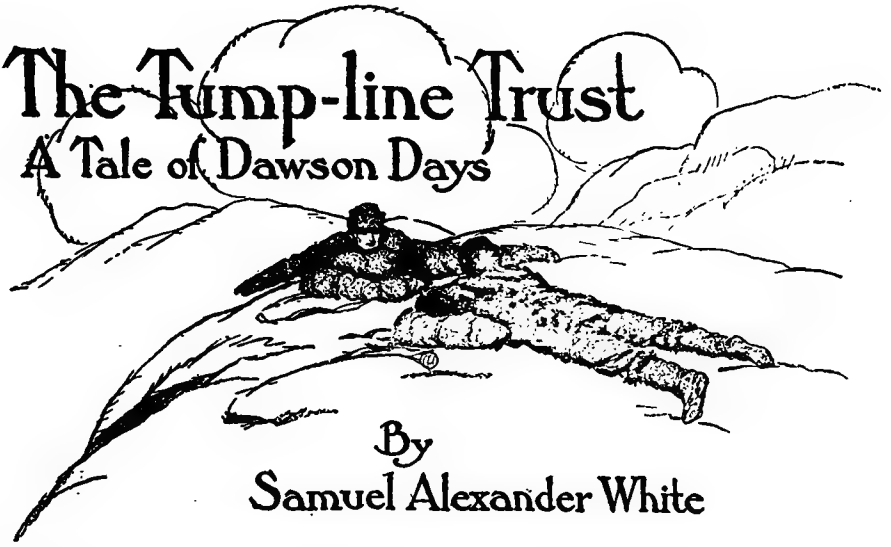
The Tump-line Trust

A Tale of Dawson Days



By
Samuel Alexander White

ON THE backbone of Chilkoot Mountain Tom Bassett and Eric Sark slipped the tump-lines from their heads, let their packs drop upon the snow, and let their bodies drop upon the packs, resting thus at full length after the manner of the Indian packers whose profession it was to portage from Dyea Beach to the Summit and from the Summit to Lake Linderman, a total carry of twenty-eight miles.

The breath came and went through their chests in great heaves, and they stared vacantly down the steep five hundred foot wall that fell to the Scales, the wall up which they had bruised their limbs, wrenched their backs, strained their lungs, and, in spite of the frost and the altitude, soaked their Arctic garments with sweat.

Curiously they watched the ant-like string of men issuing from the Scales and duplicating their performance, clinging to the ice-steps cut in the cliff as men cling to ladder rungs and clawing a way upward by sheer arm-power when leg-purchase lacked. Finally Bassett turned to his comrade a face which betrayed incredulous astonishment.

"Why in thunder are we doing it, Sark?" he asked. "It's this last five hundred feet I'm meaning. The rest of the trail isn't so bad. From the Beach to the Canyon's easy. On to Sheep Camp's fair, to Stone House middling, to the Scales passable. But this fly-on-a-house-wall business gets my goat. Tell me why we're doing it."

"Why? For forty cents a pound!" was Sark's material answer. "And a grubstake in the end. If I hadn't lost my outfit in the snow-slide that night the Canyon City men came so near hanging me for a cache-thief, do you think I'd be breaking my neck here freighting other people's stuff?"

"No, and if my dogs hadn't run wild on the hill above Stone House and fallen down a crevasse with my sled, neither of us would have packed for any one else. But I'll answer my own question. We're doing it because we don't know any better. And this is what I'm coming at, Sark. Let's know better. I'd bet a thousand dollars right now if I had it that we've packed our last pound."

"Say Bassett, how thick is the paystreak you're sitting on?" inquired Sark facetiously. "Or maybe it's a quartz vein five feet wide?"

"Neither, partner," returned Bassett, solemnly shaking his head. "It's a golden idea—the pure stuff, twenty dollars and sixty-seven cents to the ounce—and I'm sitting on it so tight it can't even wiggle."

"Let it wiggle," entreated his friend. "Let it wiggle till I see."

"All right, here goes! You see the slope of this cussed pass? Well there's nothing it reminds me of so much as a sky-scraper. Fact is I've seen lots of sky-scrapers easier to climb. And there's the idea, Eric. You never saw steel or terra-cotta going up the side of a skyscraper on men's backs. It all goes up on a rope. Isn't that right?"

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"Sure. Go on, I'm beginning to see a squirm."

"Then what's to hinder the stuff going up here on a rope? Nothing! All we need is a good wire cable, some blocks and a capstan. And there are lots of old junks on Dyea Inlet to get them from. We'll charge a cent a pound per hundred feet for the hoist—and proceed to grow rich."

"But what about the Indian packers?"

"We'll sign up every squaw's son of them! Sign them up to a hard-and-fast contract. They're charging forty cents to the Summit now and twenty-five cents to the Scales. We'll give them thirty cents to the Scales. They'll jump at that offer. We'll have our five cents a pound out of it. The owners'll find their stuff going up cheaper, quicker, and in better condition. It'll be more satisfactory to all parties. What's more, Eric, there's a joker in the game. The five-cent raise for the bucks here will lift prices on the White Pass. The owners'll kick, and all the stuff'll come this way. By thunder, it's the chance of our lives! Come on! We can't afford to rest any more. We've got to get back down. We can make Dyea Beach by night."

"Dyea Beach? But Tom, there's the rest of that Nevada gink's stuff lying at the Scales."

"Yes and there she lies!" declared Bassett emphatically, as slipping and sliding he led the way down the slope. "There she lies till we get our rope rigged. We haven't any time to waste. The more hours we lose getting fixed up the more dollars we're kicking away. Figure it out for yourself. Each man bound in has a half-ton outfit. And how many men are there? Doesn't it take your wind away? Remember we get it all at five cents a pound. Talk about your grubstakes! We'll have fleshy fortunes inside sixty days."

ALL the way down to the Beach Tom Bassett expounded and enlarged upon his scheme, and during the next few days the project took shape along the lines of his vision. Every available Indian packer was signed up to Bassett's hard-and-fast contract, and upon the shoulders of these stalwart Chilcat sons the necessary tackle, bought on credit from a sealer in the Inlet, went up to the top of the Pass.

The mountain at that height being timberless, Sark and Bassett had to make use of the rocks. They chose the smoothest face of the five-hundred-foot wall sheering upward from the Scales and at top and bottom anchored huge pulley blocks to boulders. Through these pulleys the wire cable was run. To one end of the cable was attached a giant hook. The other end passed around the rock-anchored capstan. A gang of Chilcat Indians on the capstan, and the hoisting arrangement was complete.

A drag-line on the hook was used to haul it down as the capstan unwound for each successive load. Also the haulway was improved. For Sark and Bassett had their packers bring up wood from the timber-line to build fires to melt the snow on the edge of the steep. They threw much hot water down the face of the cliff and iced it to waxed smoothness. Loads slid up it as if fixed in a groove.

From the first day the innovation proved a colossal success. There was no hitch, slip, or break in the hoisting apparatus. Its steady, even work was marvelous, and marvelous too was the amount of stuff that mounted ceaselessly up the Pass. Besides the outfits of the horde of stampeders, the big American trading companies were sending in supplies to establish stores, and these supplies in all varieties, from boxes of cigars to casks of tar, passed through the hands of Sark and Bassett.

Human freight too was mingled with the inanimate. For the crippled and the injured of the trail were elevated where they could not climb in an ingenious bucket rigged by Bassett. And bloated capitalists, lousy with wealth and too fat and too lazy to walk, likewise sat them down and ascended in comfort—at five cents a pound.

Since a fat man went up as fast as a thin man, Bassett found much profit in these heavy-weights. So he assiduously sought them out, booking their passages after the fashion of a steamship agent. And in doing this the immense possibilities of passenger traffic struck him.

"We should have built her double, Eric," he told Sark. "We sure should have built her double—passengers and freight! But it isn't too late yet. We'll kick in and do it. What's more, we'll extend our system. We got funds now. We'll put in a hoist from Stone House to the Scales and a drag-down on the other side of the Pass from the Summit to Crater Lake. Yes, by thunder, and

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we'll end up with an aerial tramway clean from Stone House to Lake Linderman!

"Talk about your Klondike! We don't need to run after any Klondike. We got one right here—a gold mine, Eric, with millions in it. Why, we aren't any pair of piker contractors. We aren't any measly company. We're a trust—the original and unprevaricated Tump-Line Trust. Wake up, partner, and enthuse some! Don't you see our scope?"

"That's just what troubles me," replied Sark. "Our scope! It's too big, Tom. And you know thundering well that no trust can last. Just when she swells up stout, somebody always swings the ax and lets the works out. Maybe we better play safe. We're ten thousand dollars to the good already. It's only a month to Spring, just time to make Dawson City before the Yukon floods. Maybe we better sell this hoisting-concern to the highest bidder and strike up the lakes."

"Sell?" snorted Bassett in derision. "With ten thousand? Partner you sure got cold feet. You need a nerve-tonic or a circulation-starter. Sell? Ten thousand? You mean ten million! That's my figure. When we've piled it up, we'll sell. Not before. Ten million. Memorize that, Eric. And tonight we'll go down the mountain and buy that cable for our passenger route."

Additional objections from Sark, his contention that avalanches or rock-slides might easily bury their haulway, that there might be a change of route inland or a railroad projected through the White Pass, had no effect upon Bassett. His feet were solidly planted on the highway to millions. There was no pulling him off, and assuredly he would have traveled that highway without stop or incident had it not been for the joker he himself had slipped into the game.

The joker was the incentive he had given the White Pass stuff to come his way. On the Chilkoot he was paying the Indian packers five cents a pound more than they formerly received for the carry to the Scales. Also the owners of the goods found themselves charged five cents a pound less to the Summit. As prices on one Pass ruled prices on the other, the packers on the White Pass demanded a five-cent raise, while the owners demanded a five-cent cut.

Between the two demands was a difference of ten cents over which they haggled and fought till the stubborn owners faced about and took their goods in by way of Chilkoot. And rather than lower their rates, the White Pass packers struck, established in retaliation a boycott on the White Pass route, and went to work for Sark and Bassett.

FOR a period the merest dribble of men and merchandise trickled over the White Pass. Trade through that gateway received a heavy jolt. Skagway itself registered the depression. Smaller camps and road-houses vanished from the wayside, and the larger camps such as White Pass City, Summit Lake, and Log Cabin, felt themselves inevitably dwindling. These camps existed on the ingoing rush, and when the rush ceased to go in the camps made ready to die.

Owners of stores and restaurants, who had done a colossal business at extortionate rates for many months, closed up their places and sought more lucrative employment. Scores who had but started business by investing all their savings in stock and fixtures were speedily and totally bankrupted, but the man whom the slump in trade hit the hardest was Casino Charlie of White Pass City.

It hit Casino Charlie hardest because his daily income was the greatest. When he lost it, he lost the most. His stand, the Pioneer, was a combined restaurant and bunk-house, but this was only a blind for an underground bar which, in charge of his chief lieutenants Ante Baker and Gunboat Kane, ran wide open down below. Whisky was priced at a dollar a glass, and Casino was accustomed to illegally sell some hundreds of glasses a day. So the boycotting of the White Pass route and the coming of no more patrons touched him vitally.

"Boys," he growled to Ante and Gunboat one day when the slump had hit rock-bottom and refused to move, "this Tump-Line Trust of Sark's and Bassett's sure has ruined me. You may as well fish out your hammers and nail up these windows and doors. The Pioneer is closed to the public."

Sorrowfully Ante and Gunboat did as directed, spacing their hammer-blows with mournful laments concerning the Pioneer's departed glory.

"Where we goin' to strike now, Casino?" asked Gunboat, when the thing was finished

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and they stood eying their ominous handiwork.

"Over the Chilkoot," Casino told him. "We'll look things over and mebbe locate about Happy Camp and get all the trade as it comes down. There's nothin' doin' for a little on the White Pass Trail this side of Bennett. Come and leg it, boys. No use standin' cryin' over the blessed shack. We got to get down to Skagway and across to Dyea."

"But it sure is a bellowin' shame!" protested Ante Baker, continually casting back regretful looks toward the Pioneer as they made their way down the Skagway Valley, "to see yon good stand abandoned for a dead loss."

"There's worse things than the stand to worry about," Gunboat reminded him. "Just call to mind the fresh stock of liquid we ordered and lyin' at Skagway. What you goin' to do with them thousand flasks, Casino?"

"Take them with us up the Chilkoot."

"But we can't pack them all ourselves. And if we could, they'd break in spite of us goin' up past the Scales."

"Do we need to pack them ourselves?" asked Casino blandly. "What's the Tump-Line Trust for? Ain't it to relieve people of the responsibilities of packin'?"

"Blazes!" exclaimed Gunboat. "You're goin' to give Sark and Bassett the job? They kill your trade, take the beans out of your mouth, and nail up your windows and doors. And you turn 'round and stick money in their pockets. Say, Casino, what's your line of business since you shut up the Pioneer? Philantherpism?"

"Yes," nodded Casino, "benign philantherpism. And you two is my private secretaries on the job. You can take the appointment at the usual wages, to be paid when we strike Happy Camp. But remember it ain't customary for private secretaries to butt into the boss' office without call, or to ask too many questions."

Ante and Gunboat took the hint.

THE twelve miles to Skagway were trailed in silence, except for Ante's and Gunboat's whispered speculations behind Casino's stolid back.

"There's somethin' under all this," Ante prophesied to Gunboat. "Casino's got a funny shine in his eye. And he's too meek. He's too thunderin' meek! When he gets meek that way, somebody's goin' to get hit. Gunboat, I'll bet you a hundred ounces when I get it that he's gunnin' for the Tump-Line Trust."

Yet even in the face of Ante Baker's prophecy there was nothing belligerent in Casino's attitude when he met Sark and Bassett at the Scales. They had just sent up their last load that evening and were about to go down to Dyea to purchase the other cable for the passenger-hoist, which Bassett insisted on installing. But at Casino Charlie's request they postponed their going till they should have hoisted his goods.

"It'll be along any minute now," he announced. "Ante and Gunboat and me passed your packers at Stone House. And I'd sure like to have the stuff on the Summit tonight so as to get an early start down in the mornin'. I hope I ain't incommodin' you men any."

"Don't mention it, Casino, don't mention it!" exclaimed Bassett, who in the exaltation of his vision was tolerant of all things. "We'll elevate your goods all right. Where you heading?"

"Happy Camp."

"To locate?"

"Permanent."

"What's the matter with White Pass City?"

"White Pass City?" Casino Charlie rolled mornful eyes at Bassett. "White Pass City? There ain't any White Pass City. There ain't even any White Pass. She's a blind trail, Tom, with the weeds and the ground-hemlock grown over."

"Haw! Haw!" roared Bassett. "So it's as bad as that, eh? But I knew what the Tump-Line Trust would do to it. I told Eric what it would do. Didn't I, Eric?"

Sark nodded.

"Callan weigh your stuff?" he asked Casino.

"Yes. Half a ton. Here's the slip."

Casino handed him the blue paper containing the tally and signature of Callan, manager for Sark and Bassett at the Dyea end.

"How much do I owe you?"

Sark passed the slip on to Bassett.

"That's Tom's job," he observed

"Sure is," laughed Bassett, gleefully scrawling upon the back of the paper. "Let's see. A thousand pound at thirty cents is three hundred dollars. A thousand

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pound at five cents is fifty dollars. Three hundred and fifty dollars, Casino."

"Gimme a receipt," requested Casino, pulling out his wallet. "And what do I pay for insurance?"

"Insurance!" exploded the astonished Bassett. "We don't insure."

"Oh! You don't, eh? What in blazes kind of business are you runnin'? My goods is wet. A thousand flasks. Do you think I'm goin' to let you derrick them thousand flasks five hundred feet in the air without insurin'? What if you drop them?"

"Drop them!" snorted Bassett, whose pride in his hoist was hurt by the mere suggestion. "We don't drop things. Why the lame and the halt and the blind go up on that rope. And we've never dropped so much as a pants button yet."

"But that's no reasonin'. You might start tonight. I brought them flasks all the way from Skagway, and I got to have some bond against damage or destruction."

"Anything we damage or destroy we pay for," Bassett heatedly pointed out.

"Well, what's that but insurance?" demanded Casino. "Besides, them flasks of mine ain't like other goods. They're breakable. And they're worth ten dollars apiece."

"They're not breakable—with us," boasted Bassett. "If you dream they are, we'll pay you ten dollars apiece for all we break."

"Put up your money. Gunboat'll hold it. Ante'll hold my three hundred and fifty that's comin' to you. You get them up safe and you collect. You damage them and I collect for all you damage. Put up your money."

"Hold on, Tom," cautioned Sark, as Bassett pulled out the poke that contained their total funds. "I wouldn't take that bet. The odds are too big. Ten thousand dollars against three hundred and fifty dollars is about thirty to one."

"Mind I ain't pleadin' with you to take it," put in Casino. "Only I got to have a guarantee. If you don't want to give me a guarantee, you sure needn't. But if you don't lift them flasks you ain't fulfilled the contract you entered into the minute your man Callan accepted my goods for packin' from Dyea to the Summit. You ain't fulfilled it, I repeat, and you won't get a measly cent of your three hundred and fifty dollars. Savvy that?"

WITH placid unconcern Casino stepped out of the argument, seated himself upon the capstan, and, as if his thoughts were fixed on something a thousand miles away, absently commenced to fill his pipe.

Sark and Bassett continued the argument, Sark expostulating, Bassett insisting.

"It's a bluff, Eric," Tom declaimed. "We're not making donations of three hundred and fifty dollars to tin-horns like Casino Charlie. We'll call him right this minute and call him hard."

"All right, Tom," his partner finally gave in, "call ahead. Go on and call. But do it quick. Here are the bucks with the stuff. Let's hoist before it gets real dark."

Stooping under the hundred-pound boxes on their backs, ten thick-legged, heavy-shouldered Chilcat Indians filed up through the wintry dusk. Deftly slipping the tump-lines from their heads, they gently lowered the boxes into the snow.

"Jump on to the capstan there," Bassett ordered them. "And don't for the scalps of you let her slip. Eric, you're strong on lashing. You better put the ropes on and work things below. I'll go above."

With scientific hands Sark arranged the lashings on the boxes. He had the ten Indians pull on the ropes till the strands bit tight as iron bands upon the wood, and at their highest tension he locked the strands with sailors' knots that could not slip.

While he made his careful preparations, Tom Bassett climbed the wall with Casino, Ante, and Gunboat. Ante carried Casino's wad of three hundred and fifty dollars. Gunboat bore Bassett's poke containing the ten thousand.

Standing at the top the three squinted down the stout cable which dwindled to twine by the time it reached the Scales. Straight beneath them a dark spot the size of a man's coat, Casino's bulky freight rested upon the snow-sheeted rocks. Off to one side stood the black capstan with the Chilcats, their big frames dwarfed by depth, crouched over the bars. On the other side was Sark, the drag-line in his hand to steady the ascent.

As they gazed, Sark raised his arm. The Indians crouched lower on their bars and began to walk 'round and 'round in the beaten track. Casino's freight swung upward and started to increase in size. Foot

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by foot it rose with a slow, steady, sure motion. In the very ponderosity of the hoist itself and of its mountain frame there seemed a sense of security. There was no halt, drag, or jerk in the smooth-working tackle. The half-ton load moved, as if in the grip of Titanic fingers, up the iced face of the cliff.

AS IT neared the top, Bassett, breathing deeply while he watched, felt a thrill of pride.

"Maybe it wasn't all bluff, Casino," he observed. "But we'll sure teach you an abiding faith in——"

Bassett stopped, his next word clicking unintelligibly in his throat, his staring eyes focused upon the sagging cable. He saw the half-ton load within fifty feet of the cliff edge stop abruptly in mid-air and then shoot down with terrific momentum. There was an instant's horrible silence, and the next instant the thousand flasks hit the rocks five hundred feet below with a bomb-like report.

"Your machinery," Casino solemnly finished for Bassett.

Tom whirled upon him with a horrified expression.

"My machinery was sound!" he roared. "The boulder at the bottom must have gone to pieces, or the bloody heart of the mountain must have pulled out. But I tell you my machinery was sound!"

Like a man demented he flung down the stair-like wall. At the base, grubbing among the chaos of the wreck, were Sark and the ten Chilcats. Frantically Tom joined them in the search, but there was no salvage. For rods around the snow was whisky-painted, and the shattered glass lay upon the rocks like sparkling frost.

"Eric—Eric!" gasped Bassett. "What pulled?"

"Nothing. The cable broke."

"But, Eric, it sure *couldn't!*"

"It did. Go and see."

While Bassett ran toward the capstan, something bright tinkled down the cliff-face and bounced into the soft snow in front of him. He picked it up, a small bottle, different in shape from those that had broken, empty, and tightly corked. One smell of the bottle and one look at the parted cable was enough for Bassett. He wheeled back to his partner, with the cork in his outstretched hand.

"Acid!" exclaimed Sark, sniffing.

"Acid!" confirmed Bassett. "And Casino certainly applied her. Mind how careless he sat on the capstan?"

"Yes I do. And do you mind, Tom, what I told you about trusts? I warned you they were dangerous things to fool with. I warned you that when they swelled up big some one always swung the ax. Well, Casino's done it! He's queered our business for all time. Nobody'll ever risk it again.

"Anyway, we couldn't work it if they did, for we'd be bankrupted every day. We'd have to insure at full value everything we lifted and, when anybody had any old junk he wanted to get rid of he'd put a stiff price on it, drop a little acid on our cable, and sell the junk to us. That's the way we bought those thousand flasks."

"Sure," admitted his partner lamely. "I see it now. I stayed in the game too long. This morning when you wanted me to quit was the time to quit."

Above them on the top of the steep wall sounded a hoarse, raven-like croaking. Sark and Bassett looked up to see three contorted faces laughing over the cliff edge. A moment Casino, Ante, and Gunboat mocked them with derisive pantomime and wide grimace, then vanished over the Pass.

"There goes our ten thousand," groaned Bassett. "By thunder, when you come to figure it, there goes our ten thousand three hundred and fifty! I thought we were quitting where we started. But we aren't. We're quitting three hundred and fifty dollars to the bad. The original and unprevaricated Tump-Line Trust is bust.

"But look here, Eric, she doesn't stay bust. You never saw a trust bust yet that didn't arise again in some other form and come back at the busters. That's what the Tump-Line Trust is going to do. She's coming back at the busters. And she's coming back thundering hard."

"But we're broke," protested Sark. "We're three hundred and fifty dollars worse than broke. How in blazes can we work any come-back?"

"You give me a night to sleep on it," procrastinated Bassett. "And if I can't figure out a way to hand Casino and Company a cross-arm jolt, I'll turn snake-eater and swallow our four hundred yards of wire cable."

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YET, though Bassett had demanded a night to sleep on it, not one minute of that night did he devote to sleep. Propped up in his bunk in Scardon's bunk-house down at Sheep Camp, hands clamped about his blanketed shins and pipe in mouth, he smoked and meditated. On toward morning he picked up a handy pack-sack and threw it on top of Sark who slept in the next bunk farther along the wall.

"Eric, I've got it!" he announced.

"What? The ten thousand three hundred and fifty?" asked the awakened Sark.

"Yes, and miscellaneous other thousands, hundreds, and fifties. But, partner, you sure know I'm not mercenary. The money's only incidental. The main thing is I've worked up enough muscle for that cross-arm jolt."

"Well," yawned Sark, "all I've got to say is make sure your knuckles'll stand it before you strike."

"They're brass ones," Tom grinned, "and they won't even dent. You recall what your arguments were against running our hoist too long? You said——"

"Hold on," howled his companion, "don't you talk any more hoist to me! I told you up by the Scales it was dead and done with, and I tell you the same thing here. You just breathe the word 'hoist' to me again, and I'll turn alienist, tie you up tight, sled you down to Dyea, and ship you on the very first steamer to the bughouse plant in 'Frisco."

"Oh don't get riled!" smiled Bassett. "If you'll lift your option a minute and let me use the word 'hoist,' I'll admit that the hoist is a buried grandeur. But, for all that, the drag-down still remains a living possibility."

"The drag-down?"

"Sure. Don't you remember how I outlined her in our plans? From the Summit down to Crater Lake?"

Sark nodded slowly.

"Might be something in it," he admitted, "if the five-hundred-foot pitch from the Scales didn't kill the up-pack."

"But, Eric, it won't be there to kill the up-pack, at least not when we get our drag-down working. That's what I started in to tell you when you flew off the handle of the hoist. You recall your arguments against running that hoist too long? I do. One of them was the slides might bury our haulway and——"

"Thunder!" exclaimed Sark, leaping out of his blankets. "You don't need to enlarge, Tom. One kick is as good as a tattoo to me. Why in blazes didn't you speak of this last night?"

"Because I didn't think of it last night. But mind it won't be as easy as the snow-slide we loosened on those yaps who wanted to hang you up past Canyon City. And mind a boulder won't start her either."

"Yes, I know. But there's lots of blasting powder in the Alaska Commercial Company's stores to start her. Come on, Tom, and bolt a bite of breakfast. I'll never rest now till the snowballs commence to roll."

"But you haven't asked me where Casino Charlie comes in on this deal," complained Bassett, aggrieved.

"Casino? Oh, I forgot about Casino! But I'll sure attend to him some day when I go down to Happy Camp."

"No you won't, Eric. We'll attend to him right here on Chilkoot. He stung us on the transportation problem and we'll sting him at the very same game. He'll sure find out that bees rebound. He's going into business at Happy Camp, and he'll need a lot of stuff to do business. That stuff's got to come through our hands. There's where the diamond-hitch goes on."

"But how you going to throw that diamond-hitch?" asked Sark.

"I'll tell you after breakfast while we take our basic steps."

AFTER breakfast, Sark called the Chilcat Indians outside, and standing upon a heap of freight began to spiel to them.

"You savvy," he began in the broken English lingo that was their best means of communication with white men, "how last night that Casino man's stuff she up-she-go, down-she-come—bang?"

The Chilcats nodded unemotionally.

They understood well enough that their employers had suffered a tremendous money loss and they vaguely wondered if they were to be employed still, and if the wages owing them would be forthcoming.

"Well," Sark went on, "that rope um no more work. No more hoist. We take um over Pass, make drag-down from Summit to Crater Lake. We want you go on pack all-e-same to Summit. All-e-same as before rope we make um work. We pay you all-e-same, forty cents to Summit."

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But the cutting out of the stiff pack from the Scales upward had predjudiced the Indians against its renewal.

They shook their heads in refusal.

"Too much steep!" Tagish Jim, acting as spokesman, explained. "Too much hard pack. White Pass easier pack. We go work on um White Pass. Long pack but um easier pack."

"But we make um easy pack," Sark hastened to assure them. "We go up Summit. Carry much powder. Set powder off on top. Much smoke, much noise, much snow slide down. Fill um creek bed. Cover um rocks. Make um sled trail. Easy pack. Short pack. Savvy?"

The eyes of the Chilcats lightened.

"Savvy sure!" they jabbered.

"Then you sign contract. New contract. Forty cents um Summit. We make easy pack. You sign?"

"Sign sure!"

Thus was one of Sark's and Bassett's worries banished.

THE Indians began as usual their day of packing as far as the Scales. Word was sent down to Callan, at the Dyea end, of the fresh turn of the enterprise. Tom and Eric, first removing their capstan and tackle to a place of safety, loaded much blasting powder upon their backs and went up to the Summit to make their way smooth.

There, over a thousand feet above timber-line, working amid a swirling storm, wet and cold and bolstered only by fireless meals, they set their charges where the snow lay deepest upon the mountain-peak. A man was stationed on the trail below to warn up-coming stampeders of what was transpiring.

Anxious ones among those up-comers pushed on over the Pass between charges, and, perforce, they packed the snow under them as they went. In this manner outside aid was rendered Sark and Bassett, for by the time they were ready to send down another slide, the slide that had gone before was always leveled as a fairly smooth foundation.

So, the heavy detonations of their powder charges thundering like artillery upon the tip of Chilkoot, the smoke accompanying those detonations wreathing the peak like battle mist, Tom and Eric labored all day in the upper cloud-world. And at evening, soaked to the hide, half frozen and three parts starved, they floundered down and surveyed the results of their toil.

The creek-bed itself was completely choked, and the chaos of broken rock that marked the trend of the trail upward from the Scales was covered with a trampled blanket of snow. Far out from the base of the steep wall up which the hoist had formerly elevated freight this blanket thickened to a depth of many feet till, like a monstrous railway grading leaned on end, it stretched to the top of the pitch.

"She's sure some beautiful boulevard, Eric," sighed Bassett with a tired grin. "A man can pack twice his own weight up that and never stop to spit. It's pretty nearly as good as the old hoist."

"Not in Summer," Sark reminded him. "It'll melt."

"Oh, sure! But it'll last the Winter. That's all we want. We'll be millionaires by Spring, and we'll put in that aerial tramway I spoke of clean from Stone House to Lake Linderman. Of course on this snow-bridge there's a rough spot here and there to knock off. It'll have to be packed considerable. And maybe when she settles, we'll have to send down another slide or two to level her up. But those are only details, partner. The basic thing's accomplished. I can sleep two nights' sleep tonight. And tomorrow we'll put in the drag-down, get her working, and start to gather in the coin."

LIKE an omen of success for Sark and Bassett the next day dawned clear. The smoking blizzard that ramped high up on the mountain's crown had blown northwest across the riffraff of peaks out over the Bering. In the dazzling sun-glare on the emerald ice, Tom and Eric, aided by their Chilcats, worked with axes, carving a chute in the glacier that sloped from below the Summit down to Crater Lake.

In a short time the big force finished the chute and cleared the snow-path above of obstructing boulders and nasty ice-juts. Then the capstan which had been used for the hoist was hauled over the Pass and set up at Crater Lake.

It was not the plan to use the capstan continually. But it would serve in case of emergency, when a load jammed or balled up with snow or the snow-path itself wore

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thin. The wire cable, being unnecessarily heavy for such work, was discarded, and in its place a strong inch and a half rope was installed. So swift were these several labors accomplished that there was time that day for a trial of the apparatus.

The Chilcats who were working in the packing squads had already freighted considerable stuff to the Summit and deposited it there. Sark and Bassett gathered together a ton of non-perishable goods, packed it well on a heavy canvas and lashed it in a compact load. They hitched on their lowering rope, which was run through two pulleys on the Summit in the form of the letter S, and with feet well braced against a rock-ledge began to lower away.

The ton load slid slowly at first on the padded snow, but when it reached the icy chute it began to gather momentum. Sark and Bassett could not pay out the rope fast enough, so they threw themselves upon their backs, letting the line slip through their hands.

Burning up their heavy fur mittens, the hemp slid faster and faster, and as a crib of logs flies down a chute, the whizzing load shot down the icy alley. Like a snowplow it hit the untracked snow above the brink of Crater Lake, and hollowing out a tremendous furrow and sending the frosty vapor flying wide it wallowed to rest within a few feet of its goal.

HUNDREDS had halted on the trail below to witness the outcome of the experiment. Where a single man had laboriously packed a hundred pounds or so across the glacier's face, they saw two men hurl a ton unpacked. The invention was revelation as well as revolution to them and they raised a mighty cheer.

Their voices came faintly to Bassett on the Summit, and although his voice could not reach them at all he yelled back like a drunken Wrangel, danced on the rock-ledge, and frosted his ears while he shook his wolf-skin cap in air.

"Splendiferous, Eric!" he exulted. "Long as there's nothing below, they can travel as fast as they like."

"Sure," conceded Sark. "And when freight heaps up below on us, or there's any article particularly perishable, we can let it down in moderate-sized loads that we can hold or else put more men on the rope. Also when something sticks there's the capstan to yank her along."

"And there isn't any limit to our capacity," Bassett enlarged. "Forty cents a hundred'll be our standing charge. Eight dollars a ton. And we'll handle anywhere from fifty to seventy-five tons a day.

"Our Tump-Line Trust has sure taken a new lease of life and increased its dividends in the bargain. Seventy-five tons a day at eight dollars a ton! Doesn't it take your wind away? Thunder! It isn't a gold-mine we're running here, nor even a bank. We're right back at the mint, partner, where they make the yellow stuff. Just wait till Casino Charlie hears!"

Bassett hadn't long to wait.

HAPPY CAMP, which was laughing itself sick at Casino's tale of his exploit, had hardly time to put hands to its aching sides when Jack Burns, a famous freighter over Chilkoot, blew into Casino's new stand, the Goldorf, one frosty dawn and told of the feats the reorganized Tump-Line Trust was already performing. He described the building of the snow-bridge to kill the pitch to the Scales, and the drag-down to Crater Lake which could handle seventy-five tons a day.

"Why," Burns enthused, "there ain't never been anything like it seen in the Klondike! Two men cornering transportation, dropping every ounce of stuff going through the Pass and collecting the coin for it. I tell you the Rothschilds ain't a patch on them boys. They'll own this country before they're done."

"Blazes!" exclaimed Casino. "Every ounce, you say?"

"Every bloody scruple, if you get down to decimals," assured Burns.

"Tarnation! Then I'll have to pike up this lurid minute and look over their tackle. I've forty thousand dollars' worth of stuff comin' in from Dyea. Spent every cent I owned to stock this place. I reckoned when the Tump-Line Trust was bust that Callan would be freightin' on his own hook again, and I sent him word to boost her along."

"Well, Callan'll boost her along, all right, if you gave him the tip. But he ain't going on his own. Nobody is. Not even me. And don't you think for a second that the Tump-Line Trust stands bust. You sure cracked her up like a porcelain mush-bowl.

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But the cement they mended her with is a darn sight harder'n the bowl. So you watch, Casino, how you go butting your head against it."

"Oh, trust yours truly, signed!" leered Casino. "I have a fish-eye when it comes to lookin' after my own pocket. Nothin' goes on while I'm winkin'. But I'll just take Ante and Gunboat along to the Summit in case this Sark-Bassett combine tries any crooked work."

From the muddle of tents and crude cabins that comprised Happy Camp, Casino, Ante, and Gunboat climbed up amid the straggle of pine which marked the edge of timber-line on the north side of the Pass. They defiled through the long rock-gut leading to Crater Lake and crossed the lake to the steep hog-back which marked the rise of the glacier.

Here they passed the Chilcat Indians, straining on the capstan to start a load that had jammed up above the mouth of the chute. While Casino and his companions went up the foot-path at one side, the load started and they paused to watch. It whizzed past them like a gigantic missile and plunged to rest in the deep snow-furrow below. Instantly it was attacked by the Chilcats, unroped, ripped open, disintegrated, loaded on long freight-sleds, which Sark and Bassett had introduced into their business, and hauled down Crater Lake.

WHEN Casino, Ante, and Gunboat completed the climb to the Summit, every article of the load had disappeared. Where many hundreds of pounds of baggage had lain at the edge of Crater Lake when they paused in their ascent, there was now no trace of baggage. Only, far down on the breast of the ice-bound pit of glacial water a string of man-drawn sleds was streaking for the other shore.

"Quick work, boys!" Casino panted as he topped the incline where stood Sark and Bassett, the former reeling in the lowering rope through the pulleys, the latter coiling it as it came.

"Sure is, Casino," nodded Bassett genially. "Want your stuff down next?"

Casino gaped at Bassett's humor. He had expected rough greeting and harsh reproach.

"Oh! It's here, is it?" he blurted.

"Came up last night. Yonder's the pile. No, not the heap in front of you. That's Alaska Commercial Company goods. Yours is to the left there. Another step. Now you got it. Worth some money, isn't it, Casino?"

"Forty thousand dollars," replied Casino solemnly.

His unwinking eyes searched Bassett's countenance for a sign of some revengeful intent, but Bassett's face was placid and pleased.

"Forty thousand dollars," he repeated. "Every cent I have. And I don't mind tellin' you fellows straight that I don't want it devastated."

"Neither do we," Sark broke in. "We devastated one bunch of your goods, and devastation doesn't pay."

"You insuring as usual, I suppose?" Casino ventured.

"Oh sure!" laughed Bassett. "If you want it. But it isn't necessary at all. If you don't believe me, Eric'll give you an object lesson. You go and pick out the most fragile box in your whole outfit."

Casino picked it out, a long, slim case of extravagant-priced champagne.

"She's worth four hundred and thirty-odd dollars. Bust her, and you'll pay. You goin' to slide her?"

"Going to slide her!" declared Sark unperturbed.

He rolled the case in a bit of canvas, put on a couple of lashings and shot the bundle down the slope. It sped on the snow, but on the ice it seemed to sprout wings and fly. It popped out on the edge of Crater Lake before Casino had time to draw another breath.

"Never loosed a lashing!" Sark commented. "But don't take my word for it. Send your men down and see."

Ante and Gunboat descended, examined the case carefully, and ascended again.

"Right you are," they reported to Sark. "Never a chip or crack."

"Still want to insure, Casino?" chuckled Bassett.

"Yes," nodded Casino. "I don't see any reason for it, but I'm goin' to do it all the same. I got to play safe, you see. Go on and insure. The stuff's worth forty thousand dollars."

"We haven't that amount on us," Bassett informed him. "But I guess our note looks good to you?"

"Good as dust in the poke!" accepted Casino.

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BASSETT scribbled the note on the back of one of Callan's receipts while Sark, aided by the Chilcats who had returned from their trip across the lake, placed Casino's stuff in position for lowering. It was packed in two huge bundles, each weighing practically a ton, and poised upon the edge of the incline.

"Rope or no rope?" Sark put the option to Casino. "They'll go just as easy and as safe as the single case. But if you want them sent slow and sedate, why we'll do it."

"Slow and sedate it is, then," decided Casino. "I've played safe once with your insurance, but I'll just play safe twice and cinch the game. Put on the rope."

Sark hooked it on, and with the whole force of Chilcat Indians hanging on to the rope for an extra safety margin Casino's freight was slowly and sedately lowered down to Crater Lake.

Casino never took his eyes off the bundles while they moved, and when the second bundle rested beside the first in the deep snow-furrow, he gave a grunt of relief.

"Sixteen dollars you owe me," Tom Bassett billed him. "And you can hand me back the note."

Casino handed back the note.

While he counted out the sixteen dollars, the Chilcats, at Sark's direction, placed in position a big heap of Alaska Commercial Company freight. When Casino turned around, the fresh load was already being lowered.

"Here," he yelled, "what in blazes are you doin'?"

"Doing?" echoed Sark, lashing ropes on another load. "Going ahead with our work. What's biting you?"

"You're buryin' my stuff. You've got a ton on top of it now!"

"I know," grinned Sark. He motioned for the load to slide. "And here goes another. That's two tons."

"But hold on! I want my goods at Happy Camp right away. I can't wait till you send down all that Alaska Commercial freight and pick it off of mine."

"We don't intend to pick it off," Sark enlightened. "It's for the new warehouse the A. C. C. people are building at Bennett. They don't want it till Spring. It stays right where it is till we can load it in boats."

"Then, by thunder, you won't drop another pound of it!" roared Casino.

"We won't, eh? Who'll stop us?"

"Ante! Gunboat! Come on!" Casino wildly appealed.

Flourishing his knife and backed by Ante and Gunboat, he made a mad dash in to cut the rope.

But Sark kicked the knife out of his hand and grabbed him by the collar. Bassett captured Ante, and Tagish Jim, the Chilcat, joining in the fray, pinioned Gunboat. Before the three could guess their antagonists' intentions, they were slithering down the ice chute.

They brought up with a whack against the pile of freight. The wind was knocked out of their bodies, but they gasped it back, took a look up the chute, and to the slogan of strange words from Casino assaulted the A. C. C. stuff, frantically dragging it off to clear their own.

A warning shout reverberated above them.

Instinctively, and with one accord, they sprang swiftly aside.

A ton of baggage whizzed down and landed where a second before they had been working. And other tons swiftly succeeded that one. The Chilcats above, spurred on by the offer of a bonus from Sark and Bassett, were working furiously against time. Into a few strenuous hours they crowded a full day's labor, and Casino, Ante, and Gunboat sat helplessly by and watched the mound of A. C. C. freight grow into a mountain.

In the wake of the last load came Sark and Bassett, wearing grins that sickened Casino's soul.

"You win!" he groaned. "I can't do business at the Goldorf without it. And I can't have forty thousand dollars entombed here till Spring. How much does it cost to move it?"

"The usual rate," Bassett quoted. "We can't undertake to lift that freight unless we pack it right along to Lake Linderman. It wouldn't pay us to spend the time. But you stack up the usual rate to Linderman, and the A. C. C. men won't kick. They'd just as soon have their stuff lie at Linderman till Spring as lie here till Spring, and they'll be in pocket the amount of the freight rates. Will you pay?"

"I got to pay," moaned Casino, the look on his face the look of a man who goes under an operation at the risk of his life. "Figure it out. I ain't got the money

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myself, but Ante and Gunboat'll lend it to me. You'll lend it to me, won't you, boys?"

"Sure," they assented.

They pulled out healthy pokes, the size of which showed that the games in Happy Camp had been running their way, and as became dutiful lieutenants handed them over to their captain.

"Go on and figure, Tom," Casino begged, as one in mortal pain begs to have his sufferings mercifully ended. "How much does it cost to move it?"

And though he had figured it out many times before while with malice aforethought he had put aside the A. C. C. freight in a pile by itself on the Summit, Bassett sat down and figured it again.

"There are the statistics," he showed Casino, handing him the paper. "You can run over them yourself. And you can verify the weight by checking off the weight-tags as the Chilcats move the stuff. Our flat rate to Lake Linderman runs six and nine-tenths cents a pound. And there are seventy-five tons of A. C. C. freight on top of yours."

"Blazes!" snarled Casino. "Don't rub it in. You know I'm not strong on statistics. Tell me what I pay."

"Well, in plain total, ten thousand three hundred and fifty dollars!" beamed Bassett.

THE PLAINT OF THE NORTHWEST FREIGHTER

By JOHN MÄTTER

ONE hundred pounds is one hundred pounds,
And fifty cents is four bits;
One hundred pounds is one hundred pounds,
Ah, wirra, the long, long trail!

Fifty cents a hundred—that's what they pay me to freight;
But my pile never seems to accumulate
When beers are two for a quarter, and it stands you a half to feed.
Say, tell me, how is a man to win, and three miles per hour his speed?

This trail is long; today it seems I've never done aught but ride
A-top a blasted wagon, just watchin' the worn ruts glide
Under the wheels like ribbons—this bottom's soft as lard.
I'm glad that *I* don't work indoor, a-measurin' things by the yard.

Some day I'll quit this freightin'; some day I'll prove up my claim.
Careful, lad; what's wrong with you? Don't start a-goin' lame.
There's forty miles afront of us, and shacks are mighty few;
The sky is clear, but the wind is queer—maybe a blizzard's due.

And when I quit this haulin' game, and settle back to roll
The highball through the pleasures— Look out! There's a badger hole!
It's no more axle-grease for mine, and no more ham and egg,
It's the choo-choo cars, and the cushion seat, and the lights of Winnipeg.

So mush on, mush, you coyotes; keep a-movin' while you may;
The faster you walk, the faster comes that beautiful day—pay-day.
There's a barn ahead, and a double bed, and oats that will do you good;
There's a bar a-glare, and the gang is there, and the rest is understood.

One hundred pounds is one hundred pounds,
And fifty cents is four bits;
One hundred pounds is one hundred pounds,
Ah, wirra, the long, long trail!

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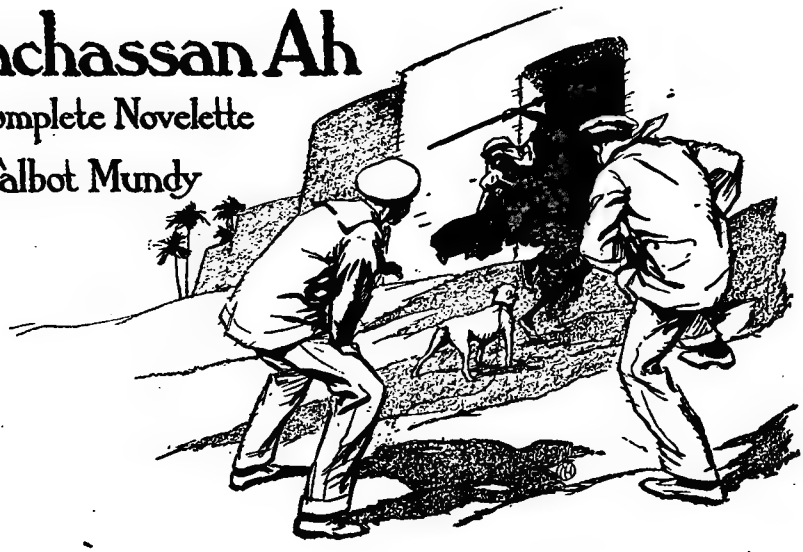
Machassan Ah

A Complete Novelette

By Talbot Mundy



WAIST-HELD in the chains and soused in the fifty-foot-high spray, Joe Byng eyed his sounding lead that swung like a pendulum below him, and named it sacrilege.

"This 'ere navy ain't a navy no more," he muttered. "This 'ere's a school-gal promenade, 'and-in-'and, an' mind not to get your little trotters wet, that's what this is, so 'elp me two able seamen an' a red marine!"

From the moment that the lookout, lashed to the windlass drum up forward, had spied the little craft away to leeward and had bellowed his report of it through hollowed hands between the thunder of the waves, Joe Byng had had premonitory symptoms of uneasiness. He had felt in his bones that the navy was about to be nose-led into shame.

At the wheel, both eyes on the compass, as the sea law bids, but both ears on the more-even-than-usual-alert, Curley Crothers felt the same sensations but expressed them otherwise.

"Admiral's orders!" he muttered. "Maybe the Admiral was drunk?"

The brass gongs clanged down in the bowels of H. M. S. *Puncher*, and she gradually lost what little weigh she had, rolling her bridge ends under in the heave and hollow of a beam-on monsoon sea.

"How much does he say he wants?" asked her commander.

Joe Byng in the chains and Curley Crothers at the wheel both recognized the quarter tone instantly, and diagnosed it with deadly accuracy; every vibration of his voice and every fiber of his being expressed exasperation, though a landsman might have noticed no more than contempt for what he had seen fit to log as "half a gale."

"He says he'll take us in for fifty pounds, sir."

"Oh! Tell him to make it shillings, or else to get out of my course!"

It is not much in the way of Persian Gulf Arabic that a man picks up from text-books, but at garnering the business end of beach-born dialects—the end that gets results at least expense of time or energy—the Navy goes even the Army half a dozen better. The sublieutenant's argument, bawled from the bridge rail to the reeling little boat below, was a marvel in its own sweet way; it combined abuse and scorn with a cataclysmic blast of threat in six explosive sentences.

"He says he'll take us in for ten pounds, sir," he reported, without the vestige of a smile.

"Oh! Ask Mr. Hartley to step up on the bridge, will you."

Two minutes later, during which the nasal howls from the boat were utterly ignored, the Acting Chief Engineer hauled himself along the rail hand over hand to windward, ducking below the canvas guard as a more than usually big comber split against the *Puncher's* side and hove itself to heaven.

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"It beats me how any man can keep a coat on him this weather," he remarked, and the sublieutenant noticed that the streams that ran down both his temples were not sea water. "Send for me?"

His temper, judging by his voice, would seem to be a lot worse than could be due to the pitching of the ship.

"Yes. There's a pilot overside, and our orders are to take a pilot aboard when running in, if available. There are three men bailing that boat below there, and the sea's gaining on them. They'll need rescuing within two hours. Then we'd have a pilot aboard and would have saved the Government ten pounds. Point is, can you manage in the engine-room for two or three hours longer? Three more waves like that last one and the man's ours anyway!"

"He might not wait two hours," suggested Mr. Hartley. "He might get tired of looking at us, and beat back into port. Then where would be your strategy?"

"Then there wouldn't be a pilot available. I'd be justified in going in without one. Point is, can you hold out below?"

"Man," said Mr. Hartley, "you're a genius." He peered through the spray down to leeward, where the pilot's boat danced a death dance alongside, heel and toe to the *Puncher's* statelier swing. "Yes, there are three men bailing, and you're a genius. But no! The answer's no! The engines 'll keep on turning, maybe and perhaps, until we make the shelter o' yon reef. There's no knowing what a cherry-red bearing *will* do. I can give ye maybe fifteen knots; maybe a leetle more for just five minutes, for steerage way and luck, and after that——"

Even crouched as he was against the canvas guard he contrived to shrug his shoulders.

"But if we go in there are you sure you can contrive to patch her up? It looks like a rotten passage, and not much of a berth beyond it."

"I could cool her down."

"Oh, if that's all you want, I can anchor outside in thirty fathoms."

Curley Crothers heard that and his whole frame stiffened; there seemed a chance yet that the Navy might not be disgraced. But it faded on the instant.

"Man, we've got to go inside and we've got to hurry! Better in there than at the bottom of the Gulf! Put her where she'll hold still for a day, or maybe two days——"

"Say a month!" suggested the Commander caustically.

"Say three days for the sake of argument. Then I can put her to rights. I daren't take down a thing while she's rolling twenty-five and more, and I've got to take things down! Why, man, the engine-room is all pollution from gratings to bilge; if I loosened one more bolt than is loose a'ready her whole insides 'ud take charge and dance quadrilles until we drowned!"

"You won't try to make Bombay?"

"I'll try to give ye steam as far as the far side o' yon reef. After that I wash my hands of a' responsibility!"

"Oh, very well. Mr. White!"

The sublieutenant hauled himself in turn to windward. Curley Crothers gave the wheel a half-spoke and looked as if he had no interest in anything. Joe Byng in the chains bowed his head and groaned inwardly; his sticky, spray-washed lead seemed all-absorbing.

"Tell that black robber to hurry aboard, unless he wants me to come in without him."

THE little boat had drifted fast before the wind, and the sublieutenant had to bellow through a megaphone to where the three men bailed and the ragged oarsmen swung their weight against the storm. The man of ebony, who would be pilot and disgrace the Navy, balanced on a thwart with widespread naked toes and yelled an ululating answer. With his rags out-blown in the monsoon he looked like a sea wraith come to life.

The big gongs clanged again, and the *Puncher* drifted rather than drove down on the smaller craft. A hand line caught the pilot precisely in the face. He grabbed it frantically, fell headlong in the sea, and was hauled aboard.

"He says he wants a tow for that boat of his," reported the sublieutenant. "Said it in English, too—seems he knows more than he pretends."

"Missed it, by gad, by just about five minutes!" said the Commander aloud but to himself. "Well—the bargain's made, so it can't be helped. That boat's sinking! Throw 'em a line, quick!"

The pilot's crew displayed no overdone affection for their craft, and there was no struggle to be last to leave it. One by one

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—whichever could grab the line first was the first to come—they were hauled through the thundering waves and their boat was left to sink. Then, before they could adjust their unaccustomed feet to the different balance of the *Puncher's* heaving deck, the gongs clanged and the destroyer leaped ahead like a dripping sea-soused water beetle, into her utmost speed that instant.

All conscious of his new-won dignity, and utterly regardless of his boat, the pilot had found the bridge at once. He clung to the rail there and braced one naked foot against a stanchion. To him the ship's speed seemed the all-absorbing thing, for either Mr. Hartley had forgotten just how many revolutions would make fifteen knots or else he had underestimated his engine room's capacity. The *Puncher* split the waves and spewed them twenty feet above her, racing head on for the reef, and Curley Crothers was too busy at his wheel to pass the pilot the surreptitious insult he intended.

The gongs clanged presently, and the *Puncher* swallowed half her speed at once, giving the pilot courage.

"This exceedingly damn dangerous place, sah!" he remarked.

"No bottom at eight!" sang Joe Byng in the chains.

Three words passed between the Commander and Crothers, and the *Puncher* hove a weed-draped underside high over the crest of a beam-on roller as she veered a dozen points, ducked her starboard rail into the trough of it, and sliced her long thin nose, sizzling and swirling, into the welter ahead. It was growing weedier and dirtier each minute.

"No bottom at eight!" chanted Joe Byng.

And at the sound of his voice the pilot hauled himself upright by his leverage on the rail and found his voice again.

"This most exceedingly damn dangerous place, sah!"

But the Commander was too busy acting all three L's—Log, Lead, and Lookout—his shrouded figure swaying to the heave and fall and his eyes fixed straight ahead of him on the double line of boiling foam. He had conned his course and had it charted in his head. There was no time to argue with a pilot.

"Port you-ah hel-um, sah! Port you-ah helum!"

"By the mark—seven!" sang Joe Byng from the chains.

"Port you-ah hel-um, sah!" yelled the pilot in an ecstasy of fright.

"Starboard a little," came the quiet command.

Curley Crothers moved his wheel and the *Puncher's* bow yawed twenty feet, as if Providence had pushed her.

"Gawd A'mighty!" murmured Joe Byng, gazing open-mouthed at fifty feet of jagged rock that grinned up suddenly three waves away.

The pilot braced both feet against a stanchion and tried to take the weigh off her by pulling.

"Half speed, sah! Go slow, sah! Go dead slow, sah! You'll pile up you-ah damn ship, sah! Ah tell you, sah, you'll pile her up as suah as hell, sah! 'Bout a million sharks round he-ah, sah! For the love o' God, sah—Captain, sah——"

"Oh, muzzle him, some one!" ordered the Commander, and the jiggling, complaining engines danced ahead, the horrid gray beneath the pilot's ebony notwithstanding.

"By the deep—four!" warned Joe Byng in a level singsong.

The two gongs clanged like an echo to him, and the *Puncher's* speed was reduced at once to her point of minimum stability. She rolled and quivered like a living thing in fear, falling on and off, nosing out a passage on her own account apparently, and seeming to be gathering her strength for a tremendous effort.

"That's bettah, sah! That's bettah, Captain, sah! Go astern! This he-ah's the bar, sah—damn bad place, the bar, sah! Go astern, sah. Captain, sah, d'you he-ah me—go astern! Try again, 'nother place further up, sah. Captain, sah! Over that way; that way thar—that way, sah!"

He pointed through the sky-flung spray with a trembling finger and his voice was rich with doleful emphasis, but the Commander held his course and carried on. There seemed neither sympathy nor understanding on that unsteadiest of ships. Curley Crothers, solemn-faced as Nemesis and looking half as compassionate, moved his wheel a trifle. Joe Byng in the chains kept up his even singsong, expressionless, as if he were an automatic clock that did not care, but must record the truth each time his dripping pendulum touched bottom.

"And a half—three!"

White foam was boiling in among the dirty welter, and the *Puncher's* bow pitched

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suddenly as the first big bar wave lifted her; a second later her propellers *chug-chug-chugged* in surface spume as she kicked upward like a porpoise diving.

"Oh, Lordy, Lordy, Lordy!" groaned the pilot. "This he-ah watah's full of sharks, an' that's the bar! You're *on* the bar now, Captain, sah!"

"By the mark—three!" sang Byng, chanting steadily as if he were in church.

"Starboard a little more," said the Commander, leaning forward and shoving the pilot away to leeward at the same time.

Then he shouted to the fo'castle head, where a bosun's mate and his crew had climbed and were awaiting orders in evident and most unreasonable unconcern.

"Get both anchors ready!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the answer, and efficiency controlled by experts proceeded at kaleidoscopic angles to defy the elements. The big steel hooks were ready in an instant.

"Stop her!" ordered the Commander.

The gongs clanged out an alarm, and the throbbing ceased.

"Hard astern, both engines!"

Again there was a clangor under hatches, and the suffering bearings shrieked. The *Puncher* dropped her stern two feet or so, and the foam boiled brown round her propellers. The shock of the reversal pitched the pilot up against the forward rail, where he clung like a drowning man.

"For the love o' God, sah! Captain, sah, we've struck! Ah told you so; Ah said——"

"And a half—three!" chanted Joe Byng.

"Stop her! Starboard engine ahead! Port engine ahead! Ease your helm! Meet her! Half speed ahead!"

The *Puncher* pitched and rolled, kicking at the following monsoon that thundered at her counter and tossing up the foam that seethed about her bow. She trembled from end to end, as if the pounding of the water hurt her.

"Helm amidships!" ordered the Commander suddenly.

" 'Midships, sir!"

"Full speed ahead, both engines!"

The *Puncher* leaped, as all destroyers do the second they are loosed. She sliced through the storm straight for the coral beach beyond the bar, shaking her graceful shoulders free of the sticky spray—reeling, rolling, thugging, kicking, bucking through the welter to where quiet water waited and the everlasting, utterly unrighteous stink of sun-baked Arab beaches. As each tremendous breaker thundered on her stern, each time she lifted to the underswell, the pilot vowed that she had struck, rolling his eyes and calling two different deities to witness that none of it was any fault of his.

"Thar's no water, sah—no water, Captain, sah—not one drop! You've piled up you-ah ship! Ah told you so; Ah said——"

"By the deep—four!"

"And a half—four!"

"By the mark—five!"

THE *Puncher* was across the bar, gliding through muddy water on an even keel and giving the lie direct to him whose fee was ten pounds English. The pilot drew a talisman of some kind from underneath the least torn portion of his shirt, and to the Commander's amazement kissed it. It is not often that a woolly headed, or any other, native of the East kisses either folk or things. But the Commander was too busy at the moment to ask questions.

"Have your starboard anchor ready!" he commanded, making mental notes.

"Ready, sir!"

The glittering, wet, wind-blown beach and the little estuary slid by like a painted panorama smelling of all the evil in the world as the *Puncher* eased her helm a time or two seeking a comfortable berth with Joe Byng's chanted aid.

"Let go twenty fathoms!"

The pilot sighed relief as the starboard anchor splashed into the water and the cable roared after it through the hawse pipe.

"What nationality are you?" asked the Commander, watching the *Puncher* swing and gaging distances, but sparing one eye now for his unwelcome but official guest.

"Me, sah?"

"Yes, you."

The pilot looked anywhere but at his questioner, and a picture passed before the Commander's eyes—a memory, perhaps, of something he had read about at school—of Christians in Nero's day being asked what their religion was.

"Are you afraid to tell me?" he asked, softening his voice to a kinder tone as he remembered that God did not make all men Englishmen, and turning just in time to cause Crothers to withdraw his right leg.

The pilot's toes were, after all, not destined to be trodden on just then.

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"No, sah, Ah'm not afraid."
"What are you, then?"
"Ah'm——"
"Well? What?"
"Ah'm English!"
"*What?*"
"Captain, sah, Ah'm English!"
"Oh! Are you? Um-m-m! Mr. White, give this man his ten pounds, will you? And get his receipt for it."

That appeared to end matters, so far as the Commander was concerned; official dignity forbade any further interest. But it was not so very long since Mr. White was senior midshipman, and it takes a man until he is Admiral of the Fleet to unlearn all he knew then and forget the curiosity of those days.

"Now, I should have thought you were a Scotchman," he suggested without smiling, studying the salt-encrusted wrinkles on the ebony face. "You like whisky?"

"Yes, sah—positively, sah! Yes, Captain, sah—Ah do!"

Mr. White sent for whisky and poured out a stiff four fingers, to the awful disgust of Curley Crothers, who saw the whole transaction. The pilot consumed it so instantly that there seemed never to have been any in the glass.

"I suppose your name's Macnab — or Macphairson—which? Sign here, please."

The pilot took the proffered pen in unaccustomed fingers and made a crisscross scrawl, adorned with thirteen blots. The pen nib broke under the strain, and he handed it back with an air of confidential remonstrance.

"That thing's no mo-ah good," he volunteered.

"So I see. Now tell me your name in full, so that I can write it next to the mark. It's a wonder of a mark! Mac—what's the rest of it?"

"Hassan Ah."
"Machassan?"
"No, sah. Hassan Ah."
"And you're English?"
"Yes, sah."
"With that name?"
"Mah name makes no diffunts, sah. Ah'm English."
"Well — here's your money. Cutter away, there! Put the pilot and his crew ashore! Sorry about your boat, pilot, but it couldn't be helped."
"Makes me believe that I'm a nigger!" muttered Curley Crothers, not yet released from duty on the bridge.
"First time I ever wished I was a Dutchman!" swore Joe Byng, coiling up his sounding line.

Ten minutes later the cutter's captain swung the boat's stern in shore when he judged that he was reasonably near enough and too far in for sharks. He had his orders to put the pilot and his crew ashore, but the means had not been too exactly specified.

"Get out and swim for it, you bally Englishmen!" he ordered, using a boat-hook on the nearest one to make his meaning clear.

One by one they jumped for it, the pilot going last. He plainly did not understand the point of view.

"Ah'm English!" he expostulated. "Lissen he-ah, Ah'm English! Damwell English!"

"All right; let's see you swim English!" jeered the cutter's captain, and the pilot took the water with a splash.

"Ah su-ah am English!" he vowed, as he swam for the shore, and he stood by the sea's edge repeating his assertion with a leathery pair of lungs until the cutter had rowed out of earshot.

"English, is he?" said Joe Byng to Curley Crothers in the fo'castle, not twenty minutes later. "I'd show him, if I had him in here for twenty minutes!"

"That fellow's interested me," said Crothers. "He's got me thinking. I vote we investigate him."

"How?"
"Ashore, fathead."
"There'll be no shore leave."
"No? You left off being wet nurse to the dawg?"
"I brush him, mornin's, if that's what you mean."
"Is he fit?"
"Fit to fight a bumboat full o' pilots!"
"Could he be sick for an hour?"
"Might be did."
"Tomorrow?"
"Morning?"
"At about two bells?"
"It could be done."
"Then do it!"
"Why?"
"Because, Joe Byng my boy, you and I want shore leave; and the pup—and he's a decent pup—must suffer for to make a 'tween-deck holiday. Get my meaning? I've a propagandrum that'll work this tide.

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You go and set the fuse in the pup's inside; and mind you, time it right, my son—for two bells when the old man's in the chair!"

So Joe Byng, who was something of an expert in the way and ways of dogs, departed in search of an oiler with whom he was on terms of condescension; and he returned to the fo'castle a little later with the nastiest, most awful-smelling mess that ever emanated even from the engine-room of a destroyer in the Persian Gulf (where grease and things run rancid).

II

LYING lazily at anchor off the reeking beach of Adra Bight, the *Puncher* looked peaceful and complacent—which is altogether opposite to what she and her commander were, or had been, for a month. The ship hummed her shut-in discontent, as a hive does when the bees propose to swarm, and her commander—who never, be it noted, went to windward of the one word "damn"—used that one word very frequently.

He sat "abaft the mainmast" at a table that was splotched already with abundant perspiration, and the acting engineer who stood in front of him shifted from foot to foot in attitudes expressive of increasing agony of mind. It grew obvious at last that there was a limit to Mr. Hartley's store of courteous deference.

There had been news, red hot but wrong, of dhows loaded to the water-line with guns and ammunition somewhere up the Gulf. India, ever fretful for her tribes beyond the border, had borrowed Applewaite and his destroyer by instant cablegram, and jealously held records had been broken while the *Puncher* quartered those indecent seas and heated up her bearings. It was almost too much to have to come back empty-handed. It was quite too much to have to run for shelter under the lee of Adra's uninviting coral reef. And to be told by an Acting Engineer that he would have to stay a week was utterly beyond the scope of polite conversation.

"Why a week?" asked Commander Applewaite, with eyebrows raised to the *nth* power of incredulity.

"Why a week?" asked Mr. Hartley, breaking down the barrier of self-restraint at last. "I'll tell you why. Because, although the guts of her are so much scrap-iron, you've a crew of engineers who could build machinery of hell-slag—build it, mind—and could get steam out o' the Sahara, where there isn't any water at all.

"Because—conditional upon the act o' God and your permission—I'm willing to perform a miracle. Because the whole engine room complement is dancing mad for shore leave, and there'll be none this side o' Bombay; and because, in consequence o' that, creation would be a mild name for what's about to happen under gratings until the shafts revolve again. Man, I wish ye'd take one peep at her bearings, though ye wouldn't understand.

"Because you're lucky; any other engineer in all the navies o' the world would take a month to tinker with her, even if he didn't have to send to Bombay for a tow. Because——"

"That'll do!" said Applewaite, his mind wandering already in search of suitable employment for the crew. "Get the repairs done as soon as possible; we stay here until you have finished what is necessary."

It looked like an evil moment for asking favors, but it was the time laid down in Regulations when such things as favors may be had; and it was the moment Curley Crothers had picked out for asking for shore leave.

"Come 'ere, Scamp. Come along, Scamp. Come along 'ere—good boy!" he coaxed, dragging by a short chain in his wake the sorriest looking bull terrier that ever acted mascot in the British or any other navy. Courteous and huge and cap in hand, his weather-beaten face smiling respectfully above a snow-white uniform, he took his stand before the little table.

His outward bearing was one of certainty, but his shrewd, slightly puckered eyes alternately conned the expression of his commander's face and watched the dog.

The lee scuppers were the goal of the dog's immediate ambition, for he was a well-brought-up dog and such of the decencies as were not his by instinct he had learned by painful and repeated acquisition. But at the moment Curley Crothers showed a wondrous disregard for etiquette.

"He's very sick, sir," he asserted, tugging a little at the chain in the hope of producing instant proof of his contention. But the dog was gamiest of the game, and swallowed hurriedly.

"Well? I'm not a vet. What about it?"

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"The whole ship's crew 'ud be sorry, sir, if 'e was to lose 'is number. He's the best mascot this ship ever had, by all accounts."

"He hasn't brought us much luck this run!" smiled Applewaite, remembering a long list of "previous convictions" and wondering what Crothers might be up to next.

"No, sir? We're still a-top o' the water, sir."

"Oh! He gets the credit for that, eh? But for him, I suppose we'd have piled up on the reef yesterday?"

"Saving your presence, sir."

Curley Crothers made a gesture expressive of a world of compliment and praise, but he kept one eye steadily on the dog; he seemed to imply that but for the presence of the dog on board the Commander might have forgotten his seamanship.

"Well? What do you suggest?"

"Seeing the poor dog's sick, sir, and you and all of us so fond of him, and all he needs is exercise, I thought perhaps as 'ow you'd order me an' Byng, sir, to take 'im for a run ashore. There'd be jackals and pi-dogs for 'im to chase. A bit o' sport 'ud set 'im up in a jiffy. He's languishing—that's what's the matter with him."

There were almost tears in his voice as he tugged at the chain surreptitiously, in a vain effort to produce the cataclysm that was overdue. But for all his efforts to appear affected, his eyes were smiling. So were his commander's.

"Why Byng?" he asked.

"Byng cleans him, sir. He knows Byng."

"Then, why you?"

"Why, he knows me too, sir; and between the two of us, we'd manage him proper. S'posin' he was to get huntin' on his own and one of us was tired out chasin' him, t'other could run and catch him. If there was only one of us, he couldn't."

"I see. Well? One of the other men might take him on the chain. A good-conduct man, for instance."

Crothers tugged at the chain, and the unhappy dog drew away toward the scuppers with all his remaining strength.

"He's cussed about the chain, sir—apt to drag on it and try to chaw it through. Besides, sir, when a dawg's sick he's like a man—same as me an' you; he likes to 'ave 'is partic'lar pals with 'im. Now, that dawg's fond o' me an' Byng."

"I see. But supposing exercise isn't what he wants after all? Supposing he needs a long rest and lots of sleep? How about that?"

THE argument had reached a crisis, and Curley realized it. Joking or not, when the commander of a ship takes too long in reaching a decision he generally does not reach a favorable one. The leash was tugged again, this time with some severity. The martyred Scamp was drawn on his protesting haunches close to the official table, that the Commander might have a better view of his distress. And then the expected happened—voluminously.

Curley stood with an expression of wooden-headed, abject innocence on his big, broad face, and looked straight in front of him.

"He certainly is sick, sir," he remarked.

"Sick. Good Heavens! The dog's turning himself inside out! That's the last time a thing like this happens; he's the last dog I ever take on a cruise. Take him away at once! Bosun—call some one to wipe up that disgusting mess!"

"Take him ashore, did you say, sir?"

"Take him out of this! Take him anywhere you like! Yes, take him ashore and lose him—feed him to the sharks—give him to the Arabs—take him away, that's all!"

"Me and Byng, sir?"

"Yes, you and Byng! Did you hear me tell you to take him away?"

"Very good, sir; thank you!"

Curley Crothers saluted without the vestige of a smile, and hurried off before the dog could show too early signs of recovering health and strength or the Commander could change his mind.

"Come on, Scamp," he whispered. "That was nothing but a temporary disaccommodation to your tummy, doglums; we'll soon have you to rights again."

He dived into the fo'castle with the dog behind him, and there were those who noticed that the terrier's whip-like tail no longer hugged his stomach, but was waving to the world at large.

And thirty minutes later, as the *Puncher's* launch put off with Curley and Joe Byng comfortably seated in the stern, it was obvious to any one who cared to look that Scamp was the happiest and healthiest terrier in Asia.

"Now, I wonder what they did to him," mused the *Puncher's* commander, watching from beneath his awning. "Those two men

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live up to the name they brought aboard! I believe they'd find means and a good excuse for walking to windward of a First Sea Lord!"

III

NOW an Arab would as soon allow a dog to lick his face as he would think of eating pork in public with his women folk; so the bearded, hook-nosed believers in the Prophet who looked down from the rock wall that lines one side of Adra knew what to think of Curley and his friend Joe Byng long before either of them realized that they were being watched.

Arrayed from head to ankles in spotless white, their black boots looking blacker by comparison, they proceeded in the general direction of the distant village, with the order and decorum of Sea Lords descending on a dockyard for inspection purposes. The trackless sand proved hot and sharp; the dog proved in poor condition from the voyage and the morning's incidental martyrdom, and Byng was generous-hearted. He picked up the dog and carried him; and Scamp displayed his gratitude in customary canine way.

The comments of the watching Arabs would not fit into any story in the world, and it is quite as well that Crothers and Joe Byng did not hear them and could not have translated them, for in the other case trouble would have started even sooner than it did. As it was, they tumbled and maneuvered over unresisting sand through almost tangible stench to where a gap in the ragged wall did duty as a gate. As they came nearer, a banner with the star and crescent was displayed from the wall-top, but no other sign was given that their coming was observed.

It was not until they had debouched (as Crothers termed it) to their half-right front and had taken to a narrow one-man track that ran below the wall that any overt attention was paid them. Suddenly a hook-nosed Asiatic gentleman emerged through the once-was gateway—a picture of a Bible shepherd but for the long-barreled gun he carried instead of crook—a brown shadow against brown masonry. He challenged them in Arabic, and Curley Crothers answered him in Queen Victoria's English that all was well.

"Everything in the garden's lovely!" he asserted, in a deep-sea singsong. "How's yourself?"

The man repeated whatever he had said before, this time with a gesture of impatience.

"*Friend!*" roared Byng and Curley both together. And the bull terrier took the joint yell for a war cry, or a hunting call, or possibly the herald's overture that summons bull pups to Valhalla. He was bred right and British Navy trained and his was not to reason why. He waited for no second invitation, but lit out from Byng's arms like a streak—a whip-tailed, snow-white streak—for where the Arab's hard lean legs shone shiny-brown below his fluttering brown raiment.

"Come back, there!" yelled both keepers in excited unison, but they called too late.

Each grabbed for the chain too late. Their heads and shoulders cannoned and they fell together on the hot, dirty sand while Scamp and the Arab made each other's intimate acquaintance in a whirl of ripping cloth and legs and teeth and blasphemy.

That in itself was bad enough, and good enough excuse if such were wanted for war between the Shadow of God Upon Earth and England's distant Queen; but there was worse to follow.

One does not laugh, between certain parallels, unless the ultimate degree of insult is intended. And Curley Crothers and Joe Byng did laugh. They held their ribs and laughed until their muscles ached and their strong men's strength oozed out of them.

They were laughing when they grabbed the dog at last and pulled him off. They laughed as they set the Arab on his feet and gave him back his gun; and they laughed at him with Christian and mannerly good grace when he spat at them in awful frenzy until the spittle matted in his beard. And, being gentlemen after a fashion quite their own, they smilingly apologized.

Arabia lies in the middle of the zone where laughter is not wisdom. And a smile lies midway in the measure of a laugh. A laugh might be unintentional. A smile must be deliberate. And the Arab's spittle was run dry. Creed, custom, law of tooth for tooth and the thought of half a hundred co-religionists all watching him from crannies in the wall combined to make him shoot,

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since further means of showing malice were denied him; and he raised the long butt to his shoulder with meaning that was unmistakable.

And so, with sorrow that the East should be so lacking in good fellowship, but with the ready instinct of men who have been trained for war, they closed with him from two directions, swiftly, bulldog-wise, and took his gun away. And how could even an able seaman help the dog's taking a share in the game again?

So far, nobody had done anything intended to be wrong—least of all the dog. The Arab was defending institutions; Crothers and Joe Byng were bent on holiday, and full of kind regards for anything that lived; and the dog was living dogfully up to well-bred-terrier tradition. It was as if two harmless chemicals had met and blended into nitroglycerin.

Deprived of his gun, the Arab drew a knife; and no British sailor lives who does not understand the quick-loosed answer to the glint of steel. Fist and boot both landed on the Arab quicker than his own thought served the knife, and the weight of quick concussions jarred him into all but coma. This time Byng caught the dog in time and held him back, leaving Curley Crothers to finish matters by making the long knife prize of war.

Once more he helped the Arab on his feet, smiling hugely and gentling the iron sinews with huge paws that could have wrenched them all apart if need be.

"Take my advice, cully, and weigh quick!" he counseled, looking the Arab over and making sure the unfortunate had not been too much hurt. "Run for shelter where you can cool your bearings! Run off to the mosque and pray, to make up for all that cussing. Go and be good! And next time you meets us, be friendly—see?"

The Arab was too apoplectically angry to comply, but Crothers took him by both shoulders and shoved him; and finding himself shot forward out of reach, seeing safety ahead and its possible corollary of awful vengeance, he suddenly achieved discretion and scampered through the gap in the wall.

"'E's gone to fetch his pals. Look out, mate!" warned Joe Byng.

"Not 'im!" vowed Crothers. "'E's 'ad enough, that's all! We've seen the last of 'im!"

And the most amazing thing of all was that Crothers believed just what he said—Curley Crothers, to whom Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports were as an open book, and to whom the Arab customs and religion and reprehensible tendencies were currently supposed to be first-reader knowledge. It was he who had proved there were no harems—he who coined the Navy adage, "Search an Arab first, and sit on him, before you come to terms!"

Yet here he was, advising Byng to disregard a looted Arab's spittle! There is no accounting, ever, for the ways of shore-leave sailor-men.

"Come on, Joe," he said. "Lead the dawg—he can walk now—and let's see what Adra looks like."

IV

ALL might have been well, and both seamen might have reached the *Puncher* again with dignity and grace, had they not entered Adra past the only jail in that part of Arabia. And an Arab jail being rarer and one per cent. more evil than any other evil thing there is, the two of them quite naturally paused to make its closest possible acquaintance.

"Look out for vermin!" cautioned Curley, standing on tiptoe to peer in through the close-spaced iron bars.

They forgot the dog. The jail, for the moment, challenged all their waking senses, the olfactory by no means least.

"Can you see anything?" asked Byng.

Before Crothers could answer him, a snarl, then a yap, then a quick, determined growl gave warning of the terrier's interest in something else than fleas. He had been scratching himself peacefully a moment earlier; now, like a bower anchor taking charge, he ripped the chain through Byng's hand and was off—chin, back and tail in one straight, striving line—in full chase of a pariah.

The yellow cur yapped its agony of fear; the nearest hundred and odd mangy monsters of the gutter took up the chorus; within five seconds of the start there was the *Puncher's* mascot racing after one abominable scavenger, and after him in just as hot pursuit there raced the whole street-cleaning force of Adra—tongues out, eyes blazing, and their mean thin barks all working overtime.

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"Good-by, Scamp!" groaned Byng, estimating rapidly.

"Not yet it ain't!" said Crothers, grabbing Byng's arm and nearly tearing out the muscles.

It was a crude way of rousing Byng's latent speed, both of thought and movement, but it worked. Before Joe could swear, even, Crothers was off like the wind, with Joe after him, using the string of oaths he had meant for Crothers on the sand that gave under him and made him stumble at every other stride.

Adra turned out, as a colony of prairie dogs might from planless burrows; only these had more venom in their bite than prairie dogs, and came from structural instead of natural, from flea-bepeppered instead of grass-grown dirt. Man, woman and child—the grown men armed, the women veiled in dirt-brown, some of them, and some (mostly the better-looking) unveiled and unashamed, the little children mostly naked and colored with all the human hues there are—raced, yelling, through a swarm of flies in hot pursuit. Never since Shem's great-grandson gat the Arab race was there a procession like it.

Behind its mud-and-masonry decrepit wall that guards only the seaward side, Adra straggles quite a distance desertward; and there are winding streets enough to hide an army in, provided that the army did not mind the fleas. Scamp, view-halloaing his utmost, led that most amazing hunt a quite considerable circuit before other men and dogs, arriving from a dozen different directions, set a limit to his unobstructed movement.

He knew what he was after, but they did not; they had come to see. For a moment they seemed to think that Scamp was the object of the chase, and a dozen guns of a dozen different kinds and dates were aimed at him.

And then, as consciousness dawns on a man recovering from chloroform, there swept over their lethargic Eastern brains the simultaneous idea that Curley Crothers and Joe Byng were the real quarry; and—again like men recovering from chloroform—they did not quite know what to do. Should they slay, there was the *Puncher* to be reckoned with; and the *Puncher's* port quick-firers could be seen commanding Adra by any man who cared to climb the wall.

Besides, an Arab's hospitality is proverbial. He very seldom kills a visitor on sight.

On the other hand a man, and particularly a British sailor, who runs has reason, as a rule. Therefore these two men were evidently guilty. Therefore they must not escape. In five seconds the affair had changed from a spectacular amusement, with Adra's population in the rôle of superheated audience, to a hunt of Crothers and Joe Byng.

Within ten seconds each of the sailors lay with his face pressed hard into the sand and at least a dozen Arabs sitting on him. Scamp—utterly forgotten now by all except the sailors—still behind the one stray pariah and ahead of all the rest, but beginning to appreciate the fact that he was hunted, and beginning to feel spent—raced on, took three sharp turns in close succession, and was gathered all unwilling in the arms of an enormous black man who snatched him from the very teeth of the following pack and dispersed them, howling, by means of well-directed kicks.

"Ah seed you yesterday, Ah did," said his deliverer in English; and, recalling principle, the terrier bit at him—only to find himself muzzled by a horny, huge fist that caressed even while it rendered impotent.

"Ah'm fond of little dogs! Ah'm English!"

SCAMP understood nothing of the conversation, but with canine instinct realized that he was safe; and after that he was satisfied to lie and pant. With five red inches of tongue hanging out, and no sign whatever of his white-uniformed guardians to trouble him, a black man's arms were as good as any other place; he did not waste half a thought on Byng and Crothers.

But Byng, three turnings back, spat filthy sand out of his mouth the moment an Arab deemed it safe to leave off sitting on his head, looked wildly around for Crothers, and bellowed—

"Where's the pup?"

Crothers, spitting out sand, too, twenty yards behind where the swifter Byng had fallen, called back:

"Dunno. Whistle him!"

Byng tried to whistle, and the Arabs mistook the effort for a signal. In an instant both men were face-downward again, strug-

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gling for breath and clawing at the dirt. Then worse befell.

The gentleman whose brown anatomy had suffered from the seamen's feet and fists just previous to their invasion of the town limped up with his eye teeth showing and his flapping cotton raiment still unmended where the dog had torn it. Any other wrath, however awful, could be nothing but the shadow of his state of mind; and since he knew the more vindictive portions of the Koran all by heart, and was quoting as he came, there was little need of words to further illustrate his attitude.

He seemed to be a person of authority. An Arab town or village is a democracy in which each free man has his say; not even a sheik can overrule the vote of a majority, and this man was no sheik. But rage and self-assertion will generally exercise a certain weight in tribal councils, and the crowd in this case was too doubtful of the facts to have any settled notions of its own.

"To the jail with them!" the new arrival almost shrieked, and about a dozen in the crowd took up the cry—

"To jail with them!"

"Infidels! Worshipers of dogs! Wine-drinkers! Eaters of pig flesh! Dogs and the sons of dogs—what mothers gave them birth? Are *your* hands, True-believers, fit bonds for them? To the jail! To the jail that Abdul Hamid caused his men to build for such as these!"

He stooped and looked deliberately to make sure that Crothers could not break away, then came closer and spat on him, saving half his spittle with impartial forethought for the struggling Byng, who looked up in time to see what was in store for him. Being spat on is even less exhilarating than it sounds or looks, and Byng waxed speechless after passing through a many-worded stage of blasphemy.

Crothers, the larger of the two and by six brawny inches more phlegmatic, bode his time in silence, so that neither of them spoke a word while they were hustled and cuffed along the street between the unbaked brick hovels. It was not until the reinforced iron door of Adra's one stone building slammed on them that either of them said a word.

Then—

"I'm not a mean man," protested Crothers.

"No?" said Byng, monosyllabic for a start.

"No," repeated Crothers, "I am not, Joe Byng. But—and I says it solemn; I says it with one 'and above my 'ed, and I'd take my affidavy on it in a court o' law, if it's the last word I ever does say an' it's my dying oath—so 'elp me Solomon and all 'is glory, I'm a Dutchman if I wouldn't like to 'ave a come-back at that Arab."

Byng lay full length on his stomach, and buried his face in his arms. He was still too full of wrath for words.

"I'd kick his mother, if I couldn't land on him," mused Crothers. And then he busied himself about conning his new bearings. It was a four-walled jail—one-doored, one-windowed, iron-barred—ill-smelling, verminous, too hot for words and too suggestive of the opposite of home, sweet home to call forth humor, even from a seaman.

"They'll come an' rescue us," moaned Byng. "They'll quarantine the pair of us for being lousy, and they'll turn the perishing salt-water hose on us. We're due for the brig for Gawd knows 'ow long; our reppitation's gone; we've been spat on by a —by a Arab, and we 'aven't hit 'im back; an' we've lost the pup. We've gone an' lost the pup! Gawd! There ain't no more good in nothin'!"

Which shows no more than that Joe Byng in his sorrow overlooked a circumstance or two. For instance, there were rings in the floor that Crothers eyed with keen curiosity. They were anchored in the solid blocks of stone.

"It's better than it might be, mate!" he argued optimistically. "They might 'ave gone and chained us up to those!"

V

ARABIA has some peculiarities, not all of them discreditable, which she does not share with any other country. There is, for instance, the kind custom that dictates the setting free of slaves when they have rendered seven years' good service.

That rule (and it is rather rule than law) tends to eliminate all class and color prejudice. Provided that a man will bow to Mecca three times daily and refrain from pork and wine, he may wear whatever skin God gave him and yet mingle with the best. He may even marry whom he will and can afford; and he may be whatever his ability, ambition, and audacity dictate.

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And Hassan Ah had never been a slave, so he had even less to overcome than might have been the case. He stalked Adra socially uncondemned where once he had caught fish, groomed camels, and done other irritating jobs. His old fish-catching days had given him an intimate acquaintance with the reef, and his small-boat seamanship, born of hard pulling in the trough of beam-on seas, was well suited to the local type of craft.

So nobody questioned his right to the title of harbor pilot. And if certain perquisites went with an otherwise barren office, that was to be expected. Who worked for nothing, or for the empty honor of it, in Arabia?

Nobody ran past the reef at night in shallow-draft lateen-sail boats without having him on board; and though he was never ostensibly paid for his services, it was understood that he performed pilot service in return for certain other opportunities that sometimes came his way. When things happened on the high sea that were not discussed in public, it was understood that Hassan Ah could have discussed them as thoroughly as anybody if he chose.

On the whole, then, and within limits that were only more or less definable, he was something of a personality. Men listened to him when he raised his voice in argument, and as one who could grant favors on occasion his words had weight.

The sun was very nearly at its zenith, beating down on dry Arabia between racing black clouds, when he had finished talking to the local council in the ramshackle old council-house, skin and mat curtained, that faced the sheik's where the main street broadened for a hundred filthy yards into a market-place.

All through his argument he had held a pure-white bull terrier between his knees, as proof that he knew whereof he spoke.

"Can any of you hold him without being bitten?" he demanded. And they did not seem to care to try.

"I know the ways of these men!" he asserted, drawing extravagant expressions of contentment from the dog in proof of it.

So the others in the stuffy council place gave the dog a wide berth and no privilege, but conceded him the right to hold the beast, if he wanted to, without personal defilement. And since the way of the world is that a man who has won the first of his contentions can win all the rest with half the ease, he persuaded them with a hurricane of black man's rhetoric to do what Arabs consider almost wicked.

Unbelievers who are prisoners should die, beyond all question.

"As the dregs of oil shall the fruit of the tree of Al Zakkum boil in the bellies of the damned!" the sheik quoted. "They should be hurried, therefore, to the punishment that waits!"

But Hassan Ah outargued him.

"Then they will land men from the ship, who will search our houses," he asserted. "Is there a majority in the council who would like to be searched by unbelievers?"

"Then bind them, and take them to their ship, and tell a tale of much drunkenness and wrong-doing. Ask an indemnity, and show the proofs, which will be easy to arrange."

"They, too, will tell their tale!" said Hassan Ah in perfect Arabic.

Unlike the more enlightened peoples of the West, Arabs do not encourage the mutilation of their mother-tongue; they teach it as carefully as they talk it, and this negro spoke like an Arab of the blood.

"There are certain damages they have received—some bruises on the face and tears in the clothing that does not belong to them but to their government," he continued. "They would lay *all* the blame on us, and would breathe in the face of an appointed man, in proof that they were not drunk. And who could get other drink than coffee or water here? And who would believe the rest of our story, having found that part to be a lie? There would be a landing, and a search for proof, and much unpleasantness. Besides——"

If he had intended to add further arguments, the sheik saw fit to nip them in the bud; for there were some men in the council-room who did not know as much as Hassan Ah. Any free man may speak in council in Arabia.

"What is thy way, then?" he asked.

The woolly headed pilot laughed aloud, taking care to make it evident that he was laughing at the prisoners; to laugh at a sheik or a sheik's bewilderment would be too dangerous.

"I would send them to the ship well-satisfied," he answered.

"With money?" asked the sheik.

"With whose money?" asked Hassan Ah

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"With thine?" shot back the sheik.

"In the name of Allah, no!"

The black man laughed again, and rose to lean against the wall behind him, gathering the dog up in his arms.

"If it is the order of the council," he asserted, "I will send them baek satisfied, with a tale to tell that will bring about no landing. Also, I will give the council much amusement."

"But will other sailors land afterward, seeking similar amusement?" asked the sheik.

"No! There will be an order that none land!"

The sheik took a vote on it. Heads nodded solemnly all around the room as his eyes sought each half-veiled face in turn. His own face was almost altogether shielded by the brown linen head-dress, for men of his race like to reach a judgment unobserved. They were all nods that answered him, and he saw fit to keep his own opinion to himself.

"Thou seest? These others are all with thee. Have it thine own way, Hassan Ah. Unlock thou the riddle and on thy head be the answer! Thou hast our leave to go."

SO HASSAN AH set out undaunted for the jail, with a terrier in tow behind him and a huge smile on his broad-beamed face. And behind him a murmur rose that:

"It was well. He brought the warship in, instead of leaving it outside or—as any wise man would have done—wrecking it on the outer reef, where it could have been plundered at discretion. Let him send the sailors back again and bear the consequences!"

And within a minute of the pilot's arrival at the window of the jail (through which he peered for two minutes before speaking) the whole of Adra's council, followed by the city's children in a noisy horde, proceeded in a cluster after him and took up position, each as he saw fit, at different vantage points.

Then Hassan Ah shook a loose bar of the window until it rattled, and so called attention to himself. Crothers and Joe Byng raced for the window neck and neck, and reached it simultaneously.

"You two men want you-ah dog?" asked Hassan Ah, and the chained dog leaped up at the window as both men swore at once.

"You pass him in here! Come on, you black-faced cornerman! There'll be a cutter's crew ashore pretty soon to rescue us, and if you don't hand that dog over before they get here you'll get the worst whipping you ever had in all your black life!"

"They'll feed you to the dog when they're through with you!" vowed Byng.

"Come on, MacHassan!" ordered Crothers. "Get the key and pass the dog in. That'll settle your account. Then you's free. You needn't be 'fraid."

"Ah'm English," said the pilot of the day before, with an enormous grin that showed a pound or two of yellow ivory. "Ah'm not afraid; Ah can lick you; Ah can fight same as you men. Ah'm English!"

"Fight? You Irish Chink! Which of us two do you want to fight?" asked the outraged Byng. "Come on in here! I'll fight you!"

But to Byng's amazement Hassan Ah pointed to Crothers, who was heavier by forty pounds or more and taller by at least half a head.

"Ah choose him!" he grinned; and Curley Crothers clenched both fists in absolute but quite unterrified amazement.

"Come on, then," he answered. "Open the door." Then, as an afterthought—"I'll fight you for the dog."

"Ah don't want to kill that little man," said Hassan Ah. "But Ah'll give you the dog, win or lose, if you'll fight me. You fight fair? You fight English?"

"Well, I'm damned!" said Crothers. "I fight Queensberry rules. That suit you?"

"Oh-ah yes! Keensby rules, that's it. All right-o!"

Hassan Ah produced his key and turned it in the creaking lock. He was stripping himself even before the two sailors were out in the sun, and by the time that Crothers and Joe Byng had realized that there was an audience of something like a thousand, including children, he was standing posed like a gladiator, with the straight-down tropic sun streaming off his ebony hide. As Crothers, not quite sure even yet that the whole affair was not a joke, began to doff his blouse it dawned on him that if the thing were true it would not be a picnic.

"Do you mean this?" he asked.

"Ah shohly do. Are you afraid o' me?"

That, of course, settled matters. The thing was not a joke, and Englishman or nigger—black, green, white, or gray—the

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pilot must be licked forthwith and in accordance with the rules.

Crothers spat into his hands, while Joe Byng folded up his blouse and knelt on it. He eyed his antagonist for at least a minute, summing him up and ignoring none of the woolly-headed one's physical advantages: in weight and strength, in height and reach, in being used to the climate and the glare, the odds were all with Hassan Ah. Then he sized up the moral odds; and though a biased audience might be at first supposed to weigh against him too, the sight of all those Arabs waiting to see him beaten roused his fighting dander.

"Do you represent the bloke that spat on us two men?" asked Crothers.

"Ah represent maself! Ah'm English! Ah fight English, and Ah'll prove it!"

"Aw, wade into him!" advised Joe Byng. "London Prize Rules—no time called until a man's down. Go on, Curley—lead!"

"Do you agree?" asked Crothers.

"Suttainly!" The black man seemed disposed to agree to anything so long as he could get what he was after.

"Then here goes!" said Crothers; and he stepped in and led for the honor of the British Navy.

OH! IT was a fight! Crothers knew what he was up against the instant that his left fist slid along an ebony forearm and his nose collided with what seemed like an iron club. Steamship pilot this man might not be, but fighting man he very surely was.

He hit straight and guarded high. He was no untutored savage. He had the hardest to acquire of all the Christian arts at his fingers' (or rather his fists') ends, and the heavyweight champion of Gosport took a double reef in his fighting tactics while he sparred for time in which to recover from the shock of that first blow. The claret was streaming down his face and he was dizzy.

"Oh, wade into him, mate!" urged Joe.

It is always easier to see what should be done than to do it. The sand was not slipping and giving under Joe Byng's feet, nor were his fists and wrists aching from contact with hard ebony. To him the thing seemed easy, and he was as anxious to get into the fight himself as was the terrier that strained at his chain. But Crothers, who had won a hundred fights at least in cleaner climes, fought canny and tried to make the black man tire himself with wasted effort.

And the Arabs sat in silence, like a row of vultures waiting for the end. Even the little children held their clamor and subsided into motionless calm. There was not a movement along the roofs or the wall, or in the rings of those who squatted. Arabia was spellbound, watching something she had never seen before and trying hard to puzzle out the wherefore of it.

There were knives and guns available, yet these men fought without weapons. The white contender had a friend, but the friend did not join in. Why? Had Allah struck all three men mad? They sat still to see the end, having no doubt but that it would prove to be a judgment.

Curley Crothers was the first to close a round. He put an end to round one at the end of three minutes by missing with a heavy right swing, ducking to avoid terrific punishment, slipping in the yielding sand and falling.

"Back with you!" yelled Joe Byng, afraid that the pilot would take liberties and ready to jump in and stop him if need be. But he wasted his excitement.

"Ah told you Ah'm English!" said the pilot, stepping back and letting Crothers find his corner.

Curley was glad enough of a rest on Joe Byng's knee, and too intent on getting back his wind to listen over carefully to Joe's advice. When Joe called "Time" he stepped in readily again; and this time it was Hassan Ah who suffered from surprise.

Curley had been getting out of practise on board ship; he had needed waking up, and round one had done it for him. Round two and the six that followed it were exhibitions of the "noble art" that men in any of the larger cities of the world would have paid out a fortune to have seen.

There was racial prejudice, and service pride, as well as the usual decent man's desire to win to make a real mill of what might have been nothing out of ordinary; and there were the quite considerable odds against him that—after the first repulse—usually make men like Crothers do their utmost.

Even the Arabs lost their stoicism while round two was under way. Byng yelled, and the terrier yelped, but the Arabs only shifted their position. That, though, was proof enough of their excitement; they actually sighed in unison when Hassan Ah

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thrust his ungainly chin in the way of a crushing right-hand smash, and laid his broad back on the sand.

AFTER that it was slug-and-come-again with both of them, each getting wilder as round succeeded round, but neither man obtaining much advantage. Twice it was Crothers who went down; then he discovered a soft spot in Hassan's ribs, and after that he kept the black man busy on the desperate defensive.

There was no doubt of the end, then, barring accidents. Even Hassan Ah could not have doubted it; but he did his black man's uttermost to put it off, and he fought as gamely as anybody ever fought since prize-ring rules were drafted. He did not foul, or take undue advantage once.

It was a plain, right-handed, battering-ram punch to the neck that ended things, and Hassan Ah lay coughing on the sand with bulging eyes while Joe Byng tended Curley's hurts.

"Hasn't the nigger got any pals?" asked Crothers; and then it occurred to Byng that the most hurt man was surely most in need of mending. Both he and Crothers bent over him then, and they soon had him on his feet again.

"Ah told you Ah'm English!" were the first words he succeeded in spluttering through swollen lips.

"Now, what d'you mean by that exactly?" asked Joe Byng, his attitude toward him almost entirely changed. A man who loses gamely is entitled to respect if not to friendship.

Hassan Ah searched in the tattered shirt that he had laid aside, and pulled out a folded piece of paper after a lot of fumbling. He opened it gingerly, and holding one corner of it displayed the rest with evident intention not to allow it out of his grasp.

"That says Ah'm English!" he explained.

"Oh!" said Crothers, rubbing an injured eye in order to see it better. "Can you read, you black heathen?"

"No," said the pilot. "That says Ah'm English, but Ah can't read!"

"Well, MacHassan," said Curley Crothers, reading the document a second time. "Black or white, you fight like a gentleman. I'm proud to have licked you. Good-by, and good luck! Here's my hand!"

They shook hands, and the seamen started shoreward with the terrier in tow.

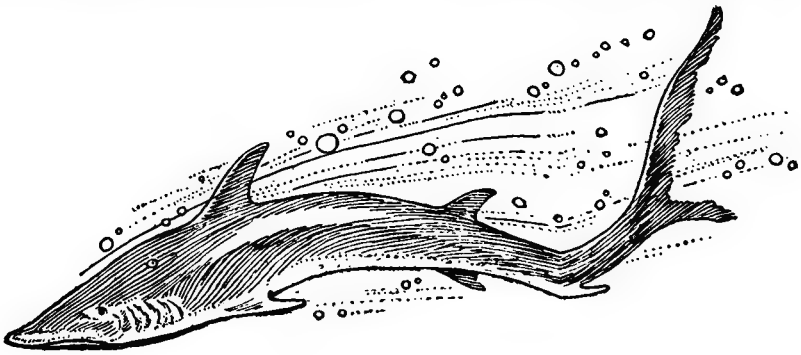
"Did you read the paper?" asked Crothers. "It was dated Aden—non-coms' mess of some regiment or other. 'This is to certify that this regiment taught Hassan Ah to use his fists, and that he has since licked every single mother's son of us!' Pity I didn't see that first, eh?"

"Oh, I dunno," said Joe Byng, who had not had to do the fighting. "You licked the savage, anyway."

HASSAN AH was right. There was no more shore leave granted. Crothers and Joe Byng were punished with extra duty and "confined to ship" for coming back with the marks of fighting on them; and the *Puncher* gave no further signs of life until, some three days later, her long-suffering engines turned again and she departed through the channel that had brought her in.

Then the sheik and three others and a certain Hassan Ah went down at midnight to the jail and lifted with the aid of long poles passed through the rings in them the largest floor stones of that vermin-infested building.

But the vermin did not trouble them. What they were after and what they lifted out was the cases of guns and cartridges the *Puncher* had contrived to miss.



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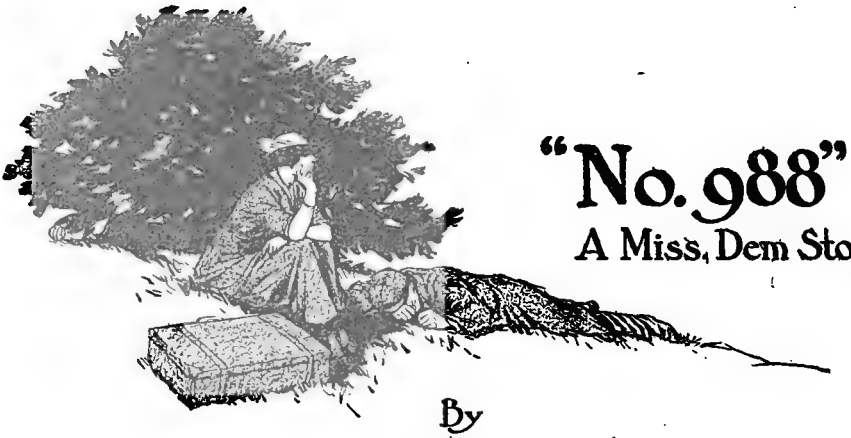

"No. 988"

A Miss. Dem Story

By

C. Hilton-Turvey

FROM the top of the wall "No. 988" glanced over the prison-yard that stretched its bare length vaguely in the dark below. He listened keenly a long moment. The blood beat in his ears. He could hear nothing else.

This was his one and only chance. Never again, if captured, would he be "trusty" to the warden. Outside a shifting-engine tooted shrilly. A freight rumbled along the track, shaking the wall on which he lay. His flesh crept in a sudden panic. The strength oozed out of him. He felt weak as water—incapable of effort—drenched in perspiration—his senses confused and whirling.

In another moment he had gathered himself together. He wriggled backward to the edge of the wall. Thirty feet and more to drop! His groping feet slipped over. An instant more and his hands, clutching at the rough stone coping, felt the pull—the weight of his body as it swung loose. One sharp-caught breath—"No. 988" let go and dropped.

NOT every one likes train travel. Miss Demonstrator, lolling in a seat in the observation car, reflected that her trip to California and back represented "more fatigue for the money" than she had ever had before. The sunset flamed in at the windows from behind the low-lying Colorado hills. The train swayed with speed.

She shut her eyes and drowsed, remembering the scenery they had passed through that day—the wonderful Gorge of the Grand Cañon, with its crags that pierced the sky. She wondered vaguely why the authorities had placed there at its mouth the grim, gray-walled penitentiary; had built its rambling length into the living rock of the cañon itself; why they had——.

The porter put a Harry Lauder record on and started the machine.

Miss Demonstrator forgot her thoughts and leaned forward to hear above the roar of the train.

The man beside her—her seat-mate in the Pullman sleeper—listened intently till Lauder's genial voice with its buzzing r-r-r-rs trailed off into silence. Then he arose with a laugh and shook down his trousers legs.

"Coming to the diner?" he asked her.

Miss Demonstrator smiled up at him.

"Not yet," she responded. "I'll wait for an appetite. If I went in to dinner now, it'd be soup an' toothpicks for me!"

"Suit yourself," he said and disappeared down the narrow alley that led to the platform of the car.

The train hurtled along in the growing dusk. Above its roar came presently—

"Second call for dinner!"

Miss Demonstrator disregarded it. The other people in the observation-car drifted out to the diner in twos and threes.

Soon the car came to a stop at a small station. Yellow lights blinked against the darkening sky. Dimly one discerned country roads leading away into the void of the night.

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Miss Demonstrator jumped up and running to the platform leaned out and spoke to the white-coated porter.

"How long do we stop?" she asked.

"A right smart while, Miss," he answered. "I reckon they's a hot-box or somethin'."

She did not wait for the end of the sentence but ran on into her own car. Here was a chance for a walk. Swiftly she snatched up her putty-colored raincoat, sought the nearest exit, sprang down beside the graveled track and walked toward the station.

The full train had brought its own life to the sleepy little place. Countrymen lounged about, enjoying the temporary stir.

Miss Demonstrator shivered in the wind after the super-warmth of the car. She swung the raincoat around her shoulders. Something dropped out of the pocket—a briar pipe!

She picked it up and turned it over in her palm.

"Hy-O!" she exclaimed. "Either I've got the wrong coat or I've took to smokin' without knowin' it!"

Investigation showed one pocket bulging out with a visored cloth cap; another with a pair of suède gloves. This coat belonged to her seat-mate, but he wouldn't need it, he was dining.

She thrust the pipe back into the pocket and, throwing the coat about her, tied the sleeves around her neck and resumed her promenade.

She leaned against the station window. Inside, the operator in his shirt-sleeves bent over his instrument. The conductor stood by the light, reading a yellow slip. Miss Demonstrator listened idly to the irregular tick-tick of the wire. She had once been an operator herself and it entertained her to see how much facility remained to her after years of disuse. Dot-dot-dot, dot, dash-dot, dash-dot-dot—it translated itself to her ear without effort on her part.

"Send—freight—engine—to—siding—below — switch — to — main — after — passenger—"

Miss Demonstrator smiled contentedly. It was like an echo of those days long gone. It purled through her consciousness—just ordinary train orders, but—hm! What was that?—"B-K! B-K! B-K!" The familiar signal for "Break in!" Something important was about to go through. Hardly meaning to listen, the message ticked itself out at her as she stood.

"Convict—escaped—tell—conductor—search—train—may—be—on—trucks."

Miss Demonstrator turned soberly away. She hoped they wouldn't find him—poor devil! In her mind's eye arose the penitentiary, sinister and gloomy against the living rock of the cañon, as she had seen it that day.

The conductor rushed out of the office. He shouted to the brakeman. The two strode off up the platform. They pushed the crowd aside in their haste. A railroad-hand came down the length of the train, lantern in hand, tapping the wheels with a hammer for possible flaws.

MISS DEMONSTRATOR strolled to the end of the platform and took to the gravel. When she reached the rear of the observation car, she passed around to the other side. It was quiet and dark there away from the station. The country stretched away into the dark. Arc lights swung across the roads, stirring in the fitful wind. Above, the sky was cloudy, with a few bright stars that winked as if the wind were trying to blow them out.

She stood a moment outside the radius of brilliant light that streamed from the windows of the train and the lighted rear platform of the observation car. Below the train the lantern of the mechanic gleamed in and out. The tap-tap of his hammer rang out. He came nearer.

Under the black bulk of the car beside her *something moved!*

Miss Demonstrator caught a glimpse of a white face. The light of the nearing lantern flashed on the wide-open eyes—and was gone! So once had she seen light gleam on the eyes of a treed coon 'way down South. And the scene that followed, to her compassionate taste, was not pretty. She remembered it now, with a qualm of disgust—the clubs thrown into the branches—the yelling and barking at the drop of the furry ball from the tree. They were out for sport that night and the first coon was thrown to the dogs.

Into her mind, like a picture on a movie-screen, slid the image of what would happen here in a few minutes. The hunted man would be dragged from his hiding-place. She could see him standing, surrounded by the crowd—panting with the struggle—the

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men holding him—the curious eyes eating him up.

Why did he not slip out now and take to the darkness of the road? Ah, yes! He did not know they had tracked him—*he* had not heard the message that ticked over the wires.

The flickering light came nearer. With it came the gleam of other lanterns, the sound of cautious voices, the high nasal tones of the conductor. Their feet tramped the gravel. In another moment.

She stepped close to the car. Her foot tripped on the borrowed raincoat she wore. She steadied herself against the smooth side of the car. She stooped. Under the car she could see nothing definite. But she spoke imperatively into the blackness.

"They're after you!"

Silence. In the dark the man moved restlessly. A loose chain rattled.

In another moment they would be upon him. Already two men came racing along the gravel on the side farthest from the station—to be on guard lest the "con" should make a break for liberty and escape in the dark.

With a sudden quick movement, Miss Demonstrator tore the raincoat from her shoulders. She held it wide before her.

"Come!" she commanded in a tense whisper. "It's your one chance!"

The oncoming lantern swung its daggers of light beneath the far end of the observation car. The racing feet crunched the gravel.

At the same moment—crouching—the man crept toward her from under the car. He trembled with fatigue and terror—he staggered—he could scarcely stand.

She guided his groping arms into the sleeves of the raincoat. His head was bare—bare and close-cropped. She snatched the cap out of the pocket nearest her and clapped it on him. It was all done in an instant.

The voice of the conductor came to them clearly as he stooped to look under the car at a point directly opposite. He was speaking to a passenger.

"Yes, we keep an eye on the wheels—" Evidently the news that had sifted over the wire was being kept secret to prevent an alarm getting through to the "con." "Here you! Bring that glim nearer!"

Had the inquisitive passenger followed the conductor around the rear end of the train, he might have asked why that official inspected the wheels with a revolver in hand. It was, indeed, only consideration for the man and woman strolling up and down beside the track, arm in arm, that made him hide the instrument of death as he passed them.

The convict stumbled as he walked—whether from the cramped position of his last few hours or from lack of food Miss Demonstrator could only conjecture. The only glimpse she had of his face showed him to be young, in his early twenties, perhaps. And through the grime that covered him, his brown eyes looked like the eyes of a dog in trouble.

What is there, anyhow, in a face that we read at first glance—something vague, yet definite, that serves us as if it were the sum total of years of acquaintance; of friendship; of intimate knowledge? That one glance committed Miss Demonstrator to a reckless adventure. Here was no jailbird—no criminal! This was somebody's son. Somebody's brother! With this last thought a deep and tender memory stirred in her. She would save him from his pursuers, or know the reason why!

A certain delicate elation rose spinning to her brain—as heady as champagne. Well she knew the feeling. It was not the first time she had thrown off the sober cloak of every-day routine and reached out for golden Adventure!

They stood a moment in the darkness outside the radius of the lighted windows. The whistle blew five sharp tones for the return of the brakesman. He came running along the track from behind, his lantern flickering as he came, like a will-o'-the-wisp in a swamp.

"What now?" she breathed half to herself.

The convict lifted his hand to his cap, then remembered his shaven head and refrained.

"Now," he stammered in a husky voice—the voice of the prisoner doomed to silence, "now, I'll take a chance at the next train—swing under again."

"And get pinched!" she interrupted, speaking rapidly. "All the trains will be watched on this line, the roads too, in all directions—the restaurants—you couldn't buy a sandwich even if I gave you the money. You can't stop a night at any house without being questioned. Why," she broke off, "the only thing that stands

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between you and the pussy-toes that's after you is the raincoat on your back—an' that ain't mine to give you!"

He made as if to throw it off, but she stopped him.

"Keep it!" she commanded in a low tone. "I said there's only one thing stood between you and capture. There's another. It's me! And you can bet I'll do it!"

She finished between closed teeth. Involuntarily her hand went out to him.

He clasped it in his grimy one, as he might have grasped the hand of a man.

"No, no," he faltered. "It's too much—I can't——"

"Shut up!" she interrupted curtly. "You must!"

A shadow passed along the light path of the windows—another—another. The passengers were filing back into the train. There was no time to spare. She waved the man beside her into the deeper shadow of a shack by the track. "Wait there!" she said, and ran swiftly to the nearest entrance of her own Pullman.

She sped up the aisle, gathered up her traps, her suit-case, her own raincoat, her hat in its paper bag. The train began to slide on the rails. They were off!

She flew down the aisle again, pushing her way past all she met. She reached the vestibule as the porter gathered up his foot-stool and swung himself aboard.

"I want to get off!" she cried to him.

The porter shook his head.

"Too late, Miss!" he said, and barring the passage reached out to close the door.

Miss Demonstrator wasted no words. She snatched the stool out of his hand. Mounting it, she grabbed the cord above her head and jerked it with all her strength!

There was the grinding of the wheels under the urge of the brakes. The train came to a standstill.

Miss Demonstrator picked up her luggage.

The conductor flung open the door of the next car.

"What's up!" he bawled angrily, looking from the porter to the determined little woman who stood at the top step.

She waved him aside.

"I want to get off," she informed him coolly, and descended.

The porter waited only till her foot left the bottom step, then banged the trap down with unnecessary fervor. The train glided past her, gathered speed, was off down the track into the night.

SHE watched as if hypnotized, till the red tail-lights dwindled to winking sparks in the distance. Then she turned, crossed the tracks, peered into the darkness. The convict was nowhere to be seen.

She took a firmer grip on her suit-case and walked all around the little shack in whose shadow she had left him. She was puzzled. What had become of him? Had he crawled under the train again—taken to the trucks—"swung under" in the parlance of the hobo?

It was dark where she stood, now that the train had taken its brilliance away. The station with its lights and the parti-color of the news-stand was the only bright spot in sight. Beyond and all around lay country fields, scattered lights that gleamed from houses far apart, dimly discerned roads that vanished into the night. The few men and boys who lounged on the platform when the train was there had gone inside the station out of the teasing wind.

Miss Demonstrator whistled softly.

No answer.

A smothered sound caught her ear. She walked toward it.

Beyond the fence, deep in the shadow, a man lay face down in the sparse grass, sobbing as any woman might sob.

Well she knew that sound. It was not the first nor the second time she had heard it. She realized that the boy had been strained to the breaking-point. It would do him good to give way. She sat down where she was and waited, listening keenly for any alien approach. The sound tore at her heart. She had to steel herself to sit there absolutely passive within earshot of it.

In a very few minutes it was over.

Miss Demonstrator waited, then arose, and approaching in a matter-of-fact way leaned her elbows on the fence and looked down on him.

"When you're a bit rested," she said, "we'll hike down the road and talk over ways and means."

He sat up and stared at her. She could feel his gaze in the dark.

"Why," he stammered, "I—I thought—you—had—gone."

So that was it—the last straw in the boy's

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load of anxiety and fear! The only one who had been willing to help him had deserted him. Coming at a moment when he was exhausted and at the end of his resources, it had been the culminating point in his despair. Miss Demonstrator smiled pitifully in the dark. She knew that it was only the body that had broken down, not the spirit.

"No," she responded briskly. "The porter saw his tip slipping away and tried to catch it by the tail. But Miss Demonstrator—that's my name—was too handy with the pull-cord, or whatever they call it, and he got left."

He was silent, a little shamefaced, wondering if she had heard.

Miss Demonstrator listened keenly.

"There's water runnin' somewheres," she remarked. "Come find it an' get a wash-up."

He rose and clambered over the low "snake-fence."

They walked down the road. Not far along they came to the place where a brook flowed into the road under its plank bridge. Fearful of discovery, they climbed the fence and followed the little stream to the center of the field. Once there, Miss Demonstrator opened her suit-case and taking from it soap, wash-cloth and towel, she tossed them to him as he sat on the grass opposite her.

He shed the raincoat and got briskly to work, bending over the water and splashing with as little noise as possible.

Miss Demonstrator watched him.

"Better take your coat off too," she suggested. "You'll wet your sleeves that way."

He hesitated. Into his mind, in spite of her kindness—or perhaps because of it—came a doubt of her. What sort of woman was this who deliberately chose to consort with a convict, to help him escape, to take his part against the law? He had seen all kinds of women in his short life—he had heard only prison talk about them in the last year. Was this one, perhaps, a criminal herself, accustomed to helping a stray pal, off his luck? Her words when he was in hiding under the car showed that she knew he was pursued, but did she definitely know why? Did she suppose him to be—no it was not possible!

A moment more he stood hesitant in the half-darkness that to their eyes, grown accustomed to it, was hardly darkness at all. Then he threw off his shabby, ill-fitting coat and took a step nearer her. He faced her defiantly in his stripes of shame.

"No. 988!" he announced with a satirical bow.

Her heart grew big with pity for him. She sensed humiliation in his attitude.

She came close and laid her hand upon his sleeve.

"Sonny," she said softly, and somehow the homely word sounded good to him, "I have a young brother who went the pace and got penned for it. Long ago his time ran out. He's never been home since—ashamed to come! But I'd give the world and all that's in it—"she swept the horizon in a wide, passionate gesture—"if Billy could stand before me as you're standin', and I could tell him that it's never made the least bit of difference in my love for him!"

The man's attitude changed. A flood of feeling overwhelmed him. He could not speak. Was this the woman whom he had doubted? Into his heart, warped and embittered by a year's shame, the cynical comments of his jail-mates—into his soul, wounded and despairing, came again faith in humanity, in love and the sweetness of human relations. Brokenly he tried to tell the woman before him something of what moved in him.

There were tears in Miss Demonstrator's eyes. Old memories welled up. But she fought them back. It was not, so she told herself impatiently, her long suit, doin' melodrama in a field at night with a "con" that had flew the coop.

She gave the arm on which her hand rested—the arm clad in the shameful stripes—a little pat.

"Remember," she declared in her most matter-of-fact tone, "what I do for you is only what I'd like any one else to do for my Billy!"

She sat down and waited till he had finished the wash-up. Then she asked abruptly—

"When did you eat last?"

No. 988 reflected a moment. It seemed a year since he lock-stepped into the big barnlike dining-room and partook in silence of the unattractive meal.

Without waiting for an answer she took out a package of crackers, some figs, and a tiny tin of canned meat from her suit-case.

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"I always travel with a lunch counter," she observed. "You never can tell when they'll switch the diner off."

She spread the feast before him as she talked.

It was long since he had eaten anything appetizing. He ate as a wolf eats, half starved in the depths of the forest.

Miss Demonstrator turned her eyes away. In her heart burned the memory of another boyish face. But she was too eminently practical to lose herself in her emotions.

"Eat hearty!" she bade him cheerfully.

Presently he sat back and wiped his mouth on his hand, prison fashion. Miss Demonstrator smiled at him, and No. 988 smiled back—the first smile that had rested on his lips since his unbelieving ears had taken in the words of the judge sentencing him to shame and imprisonment. This little feast, eaten in freedom, felt like old days to him. Involuntarily his hand moved toward the pocket of the shabby coat he had resumed.

Miss Demonstrator noticed the gesture. She jumped up, and diving into the raincoat pocket, produced the pipe and flourished it jubilantly before his eyes.

"Here, Sonny!" she said, and tossed it to him.

Tobacco and matches lurked in another pocket. Cautiously they veiled the flare of the match, lest a curious eye discern the light.

He gave her a grateful glance.

"I don't know how you caught on," he murmured, puffing away in comfort, sitting cross-legged on the grass.

"Brothers," she explained briefly. Then as an afterthought, "Good for your nerve at this juncture. You've got to get a sound sleep tonight."

As he smoked she looked him over in the dim light. He had neither collar nor cuffs. They would not dare to buy anything of the sort in this little settelment. Every farmer and storekeeper for miles around would be keenly on the lookout for the escaped convict. He might tie a handkerchief about his neck, but that was hardly what you would call dressy. They talked the matter over but arrived at no conclusion. Even with the collar of the raincoat turned up the lack of a collar underneath was painfully evident.

Then Miss Demonstrator chanced to recall the story of a famous violinist who arrived in a Western town one night and discovered he had no clean collar. The shops were closed. His manager chased all over the hotel trying to borrow one. But, alack! The man of music had a neck like a bull and the largest of the borrowed collars went two-thirds around—no more.

At last in desperation, on the stroke of eight, while the audience waited expectant, the violinist had an inspiration—he slit the borrowed collar up the back, and, boring holes at each side, laced it together with a spare "D" string at the width appropriate to the girth of his big neck, shook down the mane of his hair in the back and strode triumphantly on to the stage.

Miss Demonstrator drew her suit-case toward her and took from it a shirt-waist of that thin striped wash silk which seems to attract the athletic of both sexes. It had mannish cuffs and collar, but it looked absurdly small. She got to work with the scissors, and slit it mercilessly up the back. Feeling her way in the dark, she stitched a piece of the silk to the slit ends till the collar was of a size to fit the convict's neck.

In the same way she cut the sleeves off at the shoulders and sewed them into the shabby coat, making them the right length to show, and fastening them with her own cuff links. A soft silk scarf faked a necktie, and, with the raincoat collar turned up and the cap pulled down, No. 988 looked fairly presentable.

Miss Demonstrator clapped him gleefully on the back.

"You'll pass, old man!" she exclaimed. "Now let's get the plan into your head, and what's your part in it. But first, while I'm dopin' it out to you——"

She tossed him a box of shoe paste and a rag. And as he worked industriously at his shabby shoes she told him every detail of her scheme for his escape.

Afterward he lay down and slept, shivering in the wind, while Miss Demonstrator watched. Several times he started up half awake, dreaming of capture, to see the vague dark about him and the woman sitting faithfully beside him. His own danger in abeyance for the moment, he began to realize what she was risking for him. The feeling of the really manly man—the instinct to protect a woman from her own generosity—was strong upon him. He said as much to her.

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Miss Demonstrator's laugh, soft though it was for caution's sake, was good to hear.

"That's right, Sonny!" she observed. "Feel that way if you like. But take it from me, I'm no incubator chick. I've scratched in the barnyard long enough to be pretty tough eatin'. I'm on to the risk of givin' aid an' comfort to a con—the lady's ward in the pen, with you just around the corner doin' time at your old stand. You can bet I know the stakes!"

She was silent a moment, then she added in a whisper—

"Maybe I get more fun out of helpin' you than you think—I'm playin' you're Billy."

He lay down, but sat up immediately to say:

"I'm William G. Stevert, from Los Angeles—been working in the office of a mining concern in Colorado—in for forgery, but," earnestly, "I didn't do it. I think I can lay hands on the one that did; and if so, he can take my place in the pen—I don't want it."

"William—Billy!" Miss Demonstrator murmured to herself, and smiled.

"Oh, you needn't believe it," he said, misinterpreting her silence. "But it's true just the same."

His voice broke in a boyish sort of way. He lay down again.

Miss Demonstrator reached over and patted his shoulder.

"Billy Stevert," she declared solemnly, "I'll back you to the limit, if it's only because your name's Billy. And I believe every word you say—you're not smart enough to make it up," she added with a twinkle which was lost on him in the dark.

Long after he slept she sat beside him in the uneven field under the winking stars. The wind died down. There was no sound but the water running on liquid feet through the field. Then some one passed on the road, afoot, whistling to keep himself company; two men in a light road-cart drove down the slope from the station and disappeared in the dark; a rider galloping—the horse's hoofs loud as they struck the planking over the stream as it crossed the highway.

SILENCE again. Miss Demonstrator nodded—drowsed—slept—awoke with a start. It was gray day, shadowy, mysterious. A farm-wagon creaked past on the far-off road, heaped with produce. Miss Demonstrator trembled lest the driver should look their way.

Two people sleeping in the open were peculiar enough under ordinary circumstances—now with a convict at large everything out of the common was suspicious. She emulated the wild thing in the woods in the presence of an enemy—kept absolutely still, though her attitude was highly uncomfortable.

It was over. The wagon creaked on past, up the incline to the station around the turn. But Miss Demonstrator saw danger in remaining a moment longer. She waked the sleeping man with a touch and a quiet word.

He sprang up with a gesture of defense, hardly conscious what was happening. Then he dropped his arms and shook himself awake.

"Morning?" he asked huskily. "So soon?"

She nodded cheerily.

"We must get the earliest train out. Come on!"

She snapped the catch of her suit-case, took her hat out of its paper bag and pinned it recklessly on her head, without a thought of whether it was on right side before or not.

They walked swiftly across the field and ducked under the fence. Once on the road they could afford to take their time. Light began to sift over the line of the hills. A faint flush of rose-color mingled with it. As they reached the slope that led to the station, the rim of the sun pushed up over the horizon. It was day.

To Miss Demonstrator fresh from stage associations it was as if the curtain had gone up on an act. Her spirit rose gaily to meet the occasion. But the man beside her, unnerved by what was at stake, felt as a rat feels shaken out of the trap and surrounded—the garish daylight was all he could bear for the moment, and the sight of the farmers waiting at the station with their teams for the coming of the milk train.

He fancied they stared cruelly at him as he stepped up on the platform. But he was mistaken. Their conversation was of the escaped convict and the promised reward. They had no suspicion of the two tourists who climbed the slope and laid their baggage on the platform.

Miss Demonstrator gazed critically at

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her companion. He looked fairly presentable. The silk collar and cuffs showed up well. A pair of gloves from that mine of resource, the raincoat, hid his roughened hands. Her field-glass strapped over his shoulders gave him what she called "a tourist-y look." But his shaven head!

"I've a bottle of hair tonic in my traps, Billy," she observed whimsically, "and if half what they dope out about it was true, you'd raise a good crop of whiskers on your head by breakfast time. But it ain't—and you won't."

The station clerk passed them on his way to open up the station. He eyed them curiously. It was unusual to find passengers astir so early. Miss Demonstrator had a moment of genuine fright as his eyes rested upon the man at her side, but she contrived to divert his attention by going up to him and asking the time of the next passenger train; to which she added an inquiry as to whether he happened to have a couple of fried eggs in his pocket, since they might be late getting breakfast. He shook his head with a smile, and it was not till hours after that he recalled his momentary suspicion of her companion.

"Did you see him?" the convict whispered hoarsely when she returned to him. "Did you see him look at me?"

She could feel him tremble against her. A sudden panic had got him—a panic born of the daylight and the presence of people. But before he could betray himself further the milk train came squealing in. Unfortunately there was no passenger car attached. In the bustle of its arrival Miss Demonstrator bought tickets for the next train. The clerk slid them out across the tiny counter with one eye on the train and one on the couple before him.

They waited, strolling up and down the platform, and watched the noisy process of loading milk on the train. The air was vibrant with the din of rattling tin cans. After the milk train had puffed its way on down the track, they had only a few minutes to wait before the passenger train arrived.

THEY got a seat together. No. 988 sat by the window with the shade pulled down. The high back to the seat hid all but the top of his cap. No breakfast so far, and they had eaten all in reserve the night before. A diner was put on at the next station, but they did not dare to risk it. Whatever happened, No. 988 must keep his hat on.

Presently the fruit and candy vendor came along the aisle, and they laid in a good supply of fruit and cracked nuts, with some packages of chocolate as a dry substitute for the morning coffee. Miss Demonstrator made a wry face as she munched. She missed her warm, comfortable breakfast. But 988 ate with relish. What remained they packed up for 988 on his further journey.

More than one person passing down the aisle stared at the darkened window and at the man who sat with his cap pulled over his eyes. One oldish man retraced his steps and came past again, gazing suspiciously at the prison-pale face that showed between the cap and collar of the raincoat. He hesitated—leaned over, evidently on the point of speaking to them. But in all such cases the would-be informer is held in leash by the fear of being mistaken—of drawing ridicule on his hapless head. So he passed and they breathed freely.

No. 988 bore himself with outward coolness. But once when Miss Demonstrator sought the water cooler at the end of the car she noticed a very obvious relief on his face as she rejoined him. A certain warm, pure flame of mother feeling leaped up in her at his expression. It would have gone hard with any one who at that moment tried to wrest 988 from her!

They sat there in an agony of apprehension. Had any one discovered them? They searched the faces of the passengers. Would an officer be waiting at the next station, ready to slip the handcuffs on 988 and hale him back to durance? Miss Demonstrator had a moment of calm satisfaction when the man in the next seat settled himself for a nap. At least *he* did not dream that an escaped convict occupied the seat behind him!

Morisson, the station where they planned to alight, was a new flag station where the "Morisson Movies" had their outdoor studio. The air of Colorado is notably clear, and films taken there come out wonderfully "sharp." Here too was room in the low-lying hills for all sorts of Indian and "Wild West" scenarios. Miss Demonstrator was "persona grata" at all of the Morisson plants, for she had done the proprietor a signal service once by restoring

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to him his only son who had been kidnapped and held for a ransom. If he were at Morisson, she might ask anything she chose and it would be granted.

"Morisson! Morisson!" the trainman called out.

In another moment they stood on a little platform in the dazzle of a Colorado day, watching the train disappear down the track. So far, so good.

An irregular path led from the station over a wide landscape and lost itself among the low-lying hills, brown with the fierce heat of the past Summer. Miss Demonstrator surveyed it with elation.

"Along that there path, Sonny," she announced, "lies freedom, if we can pull off our plan—and I think we can."

There was no conveyance, so they set out to tramp the distance to the studio. It was a heavenly feeling to 988 to tread once more the friendly earth—to walk once more in the light of the sun. His feet fell into their natural gait, forgetting the hateful lock-step. Once he whistled a few bars of a song popular the Summer before, then stopped short as if at a word of rebuke. It told the tale of a year of repression that went to the warm heart of his companion. But she said nothing.

They neared the wooden gateway that marked the beginning of the Morisson place. She warned 988 not to take his hat off under any circumstances.

"It's better to be rude," she affirmed, "than to be pinched; so if you've any Quaker blood in you, keep your paws in your pockets, an' let your millinery alone!"

A man came out of a little shack at the gate as they approached and asked their business. It is about as difficult for an outsider to get into a movie plant as for a snake to get into Ireland!

"I want to see Mr. Morisson," she told him. "I'm a friend of his."

But it transpired that Mr. Morisson was off on a fishing trip.

However, Ned Eames, a man she knew well, was with the cast—a man who could be relied upon to serve her in the present instance. When she mentioned his name the guard swung open the gate.

"You'll find Ned somewheres about yonder," he said with a wave of his hand toward a ranch-house a few rods distant. "I guess it's all right," he added with a grin. "You seem to savvy all the hams in the biz."

They passed a string of cow ponies standing saddled in the shade of a lean-to. Miss Demonstrator looked at them with a smile of satisfaction. She proposed to make use of one of those horses.

A man came out of the ranch-house, dressed in regular cowboy costume, chaps and all.

Miss Demonstrator hailed him.

"Is Ned Eames about?"

The man turned on his spurred heels and pointed to the ranch-house.

"You'll find him in there," he answered, and went his way with the peculiar gait of the cow-puncher—a bit bow-legged from riding, and pigeon-toed to keep the spurs on his narrow high heels from "interfering."

INSIDE the house the movie actors sat around in groups awaiting the beginning of the day's work. Four men in full Indian costume played cards on the top of a dilapidated trunk. A feathered "brave" tried out a new dance step with a pretty "cow-girl." A young woman in a blue kimono lay on a couch with her head tied up—a martyr to the eye-strain that often afflicts a newcomer to the blinding bright light of Colorado skies. A collie snapped at flies in the darkest corner of the room.

Miss Demonstrator knew some of the crowd and exchanged greetings with them. Singularly enough she seemed to forget to introduce her companion, who lounged morosely after her, his hands in the pockets of his coat, his cap pulled down over his eyes.

Ned Eames sauntered in, dressed as a United States soldier. Evidently the scenario was a "big" one in which soldiers, Indians and cow-punchers mingled in one grand inspiring mess. His face lighted up at sight of Miss Demonstrator.

"Where's your aeroplane?" he asked genially, striding forward and shaking hands heartily.

"I left it tied to the fence," she returned with a laugh.

Eames eyed her companion with some curiosity.

"My brother," she said carelessly.

No. 988 bowed absently, his hands in his pockets.

Ned stared. Actors as a class have a scrupulous eye to the formalities on first acquaintance.

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Miss Demonstrator leaned toward the actor.

"He's been sick," she whispered. "Don't notice him."

Ned Eames nodded. A fever, he surmised, for he had caught sight of the close-cropped hair. So he said no more, but passed the word quietly around, as Miss Demonstrator knew he would, that Dem's brother was nutty—let him alone. And the kindly folk did the kindest thing they knew and ignored him.

As they chatted, the camera-man came in, fretting and fuming.

"Where's the manager?" he asked. "There's a bully light and nothin' doin'!"

A drawling voice filtered out through an open door.

"Keep your shirt on, Jim! I'm coming when I get a good and ready on—not a minute before."

A moment more and he appeared from an inner room, a tall languid-looking man, with a bunch of typewritten sheets in his hand—the cues for the entrances and exits of the actors.

"Come on, Miss Dem!" Eames said. "And have a look around."

"All right!" she assented. "I'd like a squint at the gee-gees."

They went out of the ranch-house, the "brother" following, to where the ponies stood on three feet napping after the manner of the Western cow-pony who always takes forty winks when there's a chance.

"Here's the prize horse," Ned announced. He took hold of the rein of a nervous looking pibald brute who reared and tried to bite him. "His name's Calico, and he can go a little bit, take it from me!"

Miss Demonstrator drew away cautiously.

"He may be a perfectly good gee-gee, Neddie," she agreed, "but don't put him into my Christmas stockin'!"

"Here's another—Old 49," he went on, slapping a buckskin on the flank. "He ain't much on speed, but believe me, you would ride him from here to Kingdom Come without drawing rein—a steady lope and easy as a hobby horse."

"Hm-hm," she observed thoughtfully, raising her brows at 988 who shook his head ever so slightly.

So they passed along the long line of horses. At the extreme end a dun-colored pony blinked drowsily—the very shade of the low brown hills around them. She cocked her ears suspiciously and looked around, showing the whites of her eyes and pulling back from her tether.

"Hello, Flapdoodle!" Eames sang out, keeping clear of her heels. "Now there's a pony that can go like the wind, but she's got in wrong with the bunch up at the house. They none of 'em will ride her—afraid of her. But there's not a horse in the whole string that can beat her, except it's Calico!"

"Hm-hm," observed Miss Demonstrator again; and had Eames been watching he might have noticed that she and her invalid "brother" again exchanged signs, and that this time the latter's answer was an emphatic nod of assent; and that both took particular note of Flapdoodle's place in the line.

The manager came to the door and clapped his hands. The camera-man found their distance; the actors in the first scene girded up their loins and got down to work. Ned Eames was booked for the first film, so he excused himself and left them with a genial invitation to make themselves at home.

"You can bet we will, young man!" Miss Demonstrator declared with a smile to his retreating back. "More at home than you could dream!" she added *sotto voce*.

The rest of the cast trooped out to view the proceedings, leaving the house deserted except for the girl with the headache. The collie was out frisking among the horses, in such constant movement that it would have been a lively fly that could light on him.

The two marauders slipped in the back way, ready with an excuse if any one should meet them.

Now each man and woman in the cast has a locker, like the locker in a "gym." Its number is in three places—on the outside of the locker, on the key, and on the index card on the board which contains, besides, the name, address, and so forth, of every member of the cast. No. 988 had already picked out the man most nearly like him in size and build, and casually Miss Demonstrator had found out his name. It was the work of a moment to hunt it up on the index board and get the number of his locker. It was 68.

As the lock yielded to 988's wire, he turned to his companion with a cynical smile.

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"I learned this trick at the pen," he whispered.

"Courses in burglary while you wait," she commented with a shrug.

The locker contained a blue serge suit and all else that 988 needed, underwear and shoes. And they abstracted a neat brown wig from a number in another locker.

"I'll send all this back when I'm safe," he declared, and went behind a screen to dress.

She shook her head.

"Better send it to me. I'll write Ned to slip it in the locker on the quiet. No. 68 won't see the inside of his cubby-hole till the end of the season—they live in khaki. He won't know the dif. We'll send his duds back all right. And the gee-gee," Miss Demonstrator added.

"And the pony," he echoed; but he looked troubled.

Horse theft is no small crime to a Westerner.

When he emerged from the screen he looked more than presentable. He looked to Miss Demonstrator's eyes "downright classy." The blue suit fitted him really well; the russet shoes, though a little broad, were not bad; the brown wig was not too artificial under the traveling-cap he had worn all day. And it seemed as if he had straightened up—grown more manly—since he shed the livery of the pen. He handed the convict suit to her, wrapped tightly in a little bundle. She put it carefully in her suit-case and sprang the lock.

He picked up the package of lunch she had made up for him and stuffed it into the pocket of the raincoat which covered his new disguise.

"I'll send this coat to the company's terminal when I'm through with it," he declared, "on the chance that the owner will inquire for it."

She nodded approval.

"Be sure to drop me a line."

"Oh, I'll get word to you," he promised. "I know the address by heart, in case the slip you gave me—Miss Demonstrator, care of Mr. W. Morisson, the Morisson Film Plant, New York. And you can bet I'll never forget——"

His voice broke.

"All right, Sonny!" She gave him her hand.

He took it into a fervent grasp, then with a boyish blush stooped and kissed it in an awkward sort of way.

She whacked him genially on the back, but there were tears in her eyes.

THE second act was beginning when they went out. A mêlée of horses and men and women were grouped together on the flat land, hemmed in by the near-by hills. The camera had been carried to a slight elevation. The manager, sombrero in hand, was gesticulating and yelling from time to time through a megaphone. The string of ponies had been depleted, but several remained. The dun-colored Flapdoodle still napped on three legs at the end of the line. Evidently she *was* unpopular.

Miss Demonstrator turned anxiously to 988. "Do you think you can ride her?"

He threw back his head with a confident smile.

"I've ridden cow ponies ever since I could sit on a chair."

Something in the very brevity of the response reassured her. She went boldly to the manager.

"Can you put my brother in for this scene?" she asked. "He rides like a butterfly on a rose."

The manager cast an appraising eye over the "brother"—he wasn't dressed for riding, but—well, it was a "big" scene; the more horses the better.

"Yes," he answered, "if he can find a pony and keep out of close range of the camera."

"Now for it!" Miss Demonstrator said, and they ran to the end of the line.

Flapdoodle struck out viciously at 988 as he untied her; but dexterously avoiding her hoofs, he mounted—mounted and stuck!

A rapid word or two to Miss Demonstrator—a look of gratitude that burned warmly in her memory—and he was loping easily toward the motley crowd of soldiers, Indians and civilians on the plain, being careful to keep to the far edge, away from the near range of the camera.

The wicked little mare tried her basket of tricks on him, one every minute or so, but he sat, as Miss Demonstrator had said, like a butterfly on a rose.

For the next half-hour she stood at the top of the slope watching the drilling, the shifting, the rearranging, of the big cast.

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They were hard to manage, for the crisp air and the bright day had got into their blood. In between whiles some of the horsemen did trick riding, rode short races, and got as much fun out of the proceedings as possible.

Miss Demonstrator kept her eyes on 988. Would he get away? They had laid their plans well—would they succeed?

Several times she lost him and had a time to find him with her field-glass. Once she saw a group scatter as the vicious Flapdoodle struck out with her heels, and she was relieved to find that 988 still sat his mount as if glued there.

"Ready!" the manager bawled through his megaphone.

He nodded to the camera-man.

The "bunch" started madly across the plain, close to the hills. A moment more and they had widened out like the sticks of a fan. The cameras clicked industriously. The manager gesticulated and danced about. The dun-colored pony looked vague and far-away through the veil of dust kicked up by the flying feet.

Nearer and nearer the low line of the khaki-brown hills. Miss Demonstrator gazed with her heart in her eyes—she blinked—the dun-colored pony—was gone—down a gully, 'round the turn of a hill! She strained her eyes. The dust hung in the air like a curtain that had dropped on a scene. No. 988 had made his getaway!

A SHRILL whistle recalled the scattered cast. All was confusion—new formation—another trial before the searching eyes of the two cameras. Who would notice at such a time of excited rushing to and fro the absence of one item in the big crowd?

Another sweep of the field through the glass, and Miss Demonstrator stole away—slipped out through the wooden gateway without a word to any one. Swiftly she ran up the path to the little platform by the track and flagged the oncoming train.

Late that night, whizzing along in the seclusion of an upper berth, she counted her money carefully. She had left herself only enough to get home to New York, leaving out a couple of side trips she had planned so that 988 might have the wherewithal to take him to safety. And as she drowsed off to sleep there came to her a vision of a dun-colored pony loping the distance between Morisson and a little mountain station scheduled on a more northern railroad—a winding silver ribbon that led over the mountains many a mile to home and the end of heart-wearing suspense.

A week after her return Mr. Morisson handed her a telegram. It read briefly but convincingly—

"O. K., W. G. S."

Then came a picture postal from the ranch at Morisson. Ned Eames wrote:

Sorry not to see you before you left. Remember that little devil, Flapdoodle? She got loose and vamoosed fifty miles and more, and some one found her and sent her back by parcel post or something of the sort, freight prepaid. Come again!

NED.

A few days after, a package arrived from Los Angeles. It contained a blue suit and a pair of russet shoes, also a brown wig and a few other things. Pinned on the coat was a twenty-dollar bill. Miss Demonstrator readdressed the parcel to Ned Eames with a mysterious note which ran as follows:

DEAR NED:

Please put these in Locker 68 on the Q. T. No questions asked or answered at present.

Yours in a tight place,

MISS DEM.

In a week she heard from him:

DEAR MISS DEM:

What's the answer, anyhow? I get a squint into it and then I lose it. No one else here has a glimmer and I'll keep my teeth shut on what I think.

Yours for silence,

NED.

The next item in the No. 988 exhibit was a marked paper from the West which contained the news, in an inconspicuous paragraph, that:

William G. Stevert, who recently escaped from the Colorado Penitentiary, has been granted a new trial upon fresh evidence in connection with the forgery involving a loss of twenty thousand dollars to the firm of Cobb, Kent & Co.

Last and best, a letter came soon after, written jointly by W. G. S. and a grateful mother, saying that he was acquitted. And they thanked "the angel of deliverance" in such heart-stirring terms that it embarrassed Miss Demonstrator to read it.

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Thereafter she tore the letter up into fragments and put it thoughtfully into the waste-basket, and grabbing "Angel-face" by the scruff of his neck hugged him till he grunted while she told him solemnly that she felt "like I'd grafted on a kid's bank!"

It was not till months after, when Ned Eames came North, that Miss Demonstrator "let Ned in on it." He was inclined to be huffy with her for not telling him at the time and letting him have a hand in the adventure.

"To think," he grumbled, "that we were prancing 'round doing a scenario that wasn't a patch on the one that was going on under our noses!"

To his entreaties she at last consented to let him have the full account to submit to the Morisson Movies—amplified, of course, and changed to suit. And, being a bit short of cash at that moment, Miss Demonstrator applied for the principal rôle and got it.

"The Convict's Escape" was a hit. It traveled successfully all over the country. Miss Demonstrator gave 988 a tip to take it in when it was in Los Angeles.

A BIG blond man swung down the main street of a far Northwest town. Even in that raw place he bore the ear-marks of the dweller on the outer rim of civilization. Wind and sun had tanned him till his cinder-colored hair looked at odds with his skin.

In his keen blue eyes was the look of one who has gazed far afield. His gait was the gait of the man who has trodden the snow-trail, driving a snarling pack of huskies before him. It is as characteristic a walk as that of the horse-wrangler in his spurs. His clothes were new. His muscles bulged through the cloth.

He glanced about him with the interest of a man just off the trail. It was years since he had been in a town. The street was full of movie shows. He took them all in, one after another, with conscientious impartiality.

The poster at the next door confronted him—black letters on a scarlet ground—"The Convict's Escape!" He wasn't particularly interested in escaped "cons," but after a moment's hesitation he stepped up to the ticket window, threw down his dime and passed into the darkened interior.

He groped his way in the dim light to a seat midway. The piano at the end was kicking up a din that purported to be a popular tune. The films flashed on the screen and disappeared.

The first was the scene of a young clerk robbing the safe, carelessly left open while his employer went out to lunch. Detection follows. A heart-breaking scene with the young clerk's mother at home. His departure with the officers, leaving the mother in a heap on the floor in a dead faint. Then the court, with the young man at the bar, defiant and hard.

Film one passed into darkness. Film two was announced on the screen, while the piano kept up its racket.

The interior of a penitentiary. The young man in stripes is cleaning out his cell. A letter is handed him. His mother is dying. He sits down in sudden despair. Some by-play when the guard's back is turned tells the audience that the young man is going to try his luck at an escape.

A glimpse into the receiving room. A new "con" has arrived. The "trusty" who has charge of the clothes room is the one who spoke to the young clerk when the guard's back was turned. When the warden is talking to the new arrival, the trusty leaves the civilian's suit out—bundles it up and puts it under some rubbish in a basket.

The clerk is ordered to "Take that stuff to the furnace!"

He rolls it away—manages to take the suit out unobserved and to hide it in an angle of the wall.

Still the film grinds. It is night. A moon rises and casts deep shadows.

A high, rough stone wall. A head appears above it—gazes cautiously about—listens! The rest of the man's body appears. He lies flat on top of the wall. He crawls to the edge, lets go, falls in a heap at the bottom. Stunned.

He staggers to his feet—crouches in the black shadow, his hand on the rough stone to support himself.

A railroad. A freight rumbles by, to the usual movie rumpus that represents the puff-puff of the engine and roar of the train. It slows up—stops for water. The con "swings under."

The film moves along. So does the train.

The outside of a station. A woman stands there—a man's coat about her shoulders. A pipe drops out of the pocket.

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A sign flashes out on the screen—"The Wrong Coat."

At sight of the woman's face, the big man in the audience leans forward interestedly.

Then comes the inside of the station—the conductor reading his orders from a slip. The operator in his shirt sleeves at the instrument. Then a view "close in"—the instrument with his fingers on the key—the paper on which he writes translating the orders passing over the wire.

"Send freight No. 215 to siding——"

The operator breaks off—pushes away the sheet on which he is writing and reaches for another. He straightens up as if something unusual were happening.

A quick flash on the screen shows the woman outside in an attitude of attention. She listens keenly.

Then on the screen again comes the operator's hand.

"Close in," it writes. "Escaped convict on train. Search bumpers."

The woman outside shows agitation. A vision rises in her memory—and on the screen—misty, vague—the face of a convict in stripes blots out the station—a convict looking out between the bars of a cell. A young girl outside saying good-by. It fades. A word on the screen reads—

"For his sake!"

The woman flies down the track. She opens the coat wide to the convict. He creeps from under the train. The next scene shows him walking with the woman down the platform.

Then there are train interiors, showing the woman and the convict riding—his cap pulled down, his collar pulled up. They alight before the train pulls into the train shed. Stealthily they run in the shadow of the train to the river. They steal a row-boat and cross.

A street in a city. A theater with people streaming in. The stage door. They enter on a ruse. A dressing-room flashes on the screen, piled with clothes and properties. The two get to work—some one comes. They hide behind the clothes hanging on the wall. Again they are alone. They take a man's suit—shoes—a wig. Swiftly they climb out of a window into a dark alley. There the convict changes into the new rig. He emerges a well-dressed young man.

At the entrance to the alley the woman parts from him. She holds out her hand to the convict and wishes him God-speed! The arc light swings round full on her face transfigured with love and good will——

The big man—the man of the snow trail—rose impetuously to his feet! He reached out as if to detain the picture, then remembered where he was. He sank down, his hand over his eyes. It seemed to have an extraordinary effect on him.

He stayed for the repetition—again and again he looked at the picture as if he would compel it to answer his searching gaze. When the show closed for the night, he was the last to leave.

He sought out the man at the door.

"Whose film is that?" he asked, pointing to the poster with black letters on a scarlet ground.

"The Morisson Film Co., New York City," the man answered.

The big man wrote it carefully down.

He swung on down the street, muttering jubilantly something about a mine that had made everlasting good—and some one to spend it on—if only——

IN ALL movie plants there are limp and shapeless dubs made of stuffed clothes and dressed to represent human beings. They serve their turn by being thrown over cliffs and under autos and moving trains before the camera. It's cheaper and handier than killing off the actors for a scenario. These sorely abused effigies are always having to have new heads and hands, and they frequently need to have their faces repainted.

The man who generally did this at Morisson's had a toothache. So Miss Demonstrator, who liked to have a finger in other people's pies, had taken the brush out of his hand and hustled him into his overcoat.

"There, Ikey," she bade him, "run over to the dentist. I'll make faces till you come back."

So she set herself to painting eyebrows and noses and mouths, humming a tune and stepping back occasionally to survey her work.

"Hey, Miss Dem!" some one called up the stairway. "Mr. Morisson wants to see you—down in his private office."

Miss Demonstrator finished an eyebrow. Then, putting the brush into a glass of water to keep moist, she took off the painty

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apron that enveloped her and deliberately descended, still humming considerably off the key a tune that sounded like nothing in particular.

She knocked at the door of the office.

"Come!" said Mr. Morisson from within.

She stood on the threshold smiling.

"Who wants me?" she asked.

A big Western man strode from behind the desk. He gathered Miss Demonstrator into a hearty embrace.

"I do!" he answered deeply. "And I want you bad!"

"Billy!—Oh, Billy!" she cried.

And at the rapture in her voice Mr. Morisson slipped out of his office and, closing the door softly, left the brother and sister together.

The Man-Trail

A Four Part Story—Part One

By Henry Oyen

THE whistle of the Mogul shrieked through the tamarack swamp, the brake-shoes bit, the wheels ground, and the Transcontinental Express pulled up protestingly at a tiny, unlighted shed in the wilderness.

"Dead Snake Junction," called the Pullman porter, stepping down briskly. "Um! Ooh! Dey must 'a' named dis place on a night just like dis. Wowie!"

John Peabody followed carelessly. As he stepped out he was quite ready to agree with the porter's declaration. It was December, it was midnight, it was dark and cold, and a fine powdery snow was driving like sleet under the whip of a harsh wind. John looked from the brilliantly lighted warmth and comfort of the train to the raw darkness before him and bit grimly into his cigar.

Dead Snake Junction was even less encouraging than its name. In the daytime, ringed around as it was by tamaracks and pines, the spot might have possessed some of the picturesqueness inevitable to any clearing in the North Woods. At midnight of a dark, starless Winter's night, with a north wind whistling threateningly, bobcat yowling near by, and with the blazing lights of the Express serving to emphasize the completeness of the gloom which would prevail when the train had pulled on its way, it was a triumph of desolation.

"Yes," said John Peabody, "they must have named it on a night like this."

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The porter, as he placed John's bag beside the track, shook his head for the dozenth time in wonderment over why a gentleman with money enough to tip as lavishly as this gentleman had done, should wish to—or be forced to—descend from the Express at such a place and hour.

"See dat light ovah yondeh, suh?" he asked, pointing to where a pin-prick of red light showed in the gloom. "Dat's deh tail-light of you' train. Yessuh, dat's deh kayboose of deh train what takes you up to Black Bear Lake. Dat's deh Black Bear Lake Onlimited. Ah'd tek you' bag oveh, suh, but we's goin' to rumble right now. Good luck, suh; and Ah thanks you kindly, suh! Yessuh!"

Up ahead the Mogul split the air with its mighty toot of warning. The porter sprang into the vestibule and closed the door with a slam. The drivers bit on the rails; the train moved. A few seconds later John was watching the tail-lights of the Transcontinental Express disappear in the darkness, and the yowl of the bobcat reminded him that he was very much alone.

"Whew!" he whistled. "What a cheery little place to make a new start in."

He puckered his eyes as he stared in the direction of the pin-prick of red which now alone relieved the complete darkness. He shivered. And yet, as the sharp air bit his cheeks and flowed into his lungs, he was conscious of an exhilaration which all but amounted to a thrill.

The tang of the North—the rough, boisterous North, from which weaker beings flee to softer, milder climes, and which strong men come to love and glory in, once they have felt its stinging whip—was in the air. It carried with it a sense of the freedom of vast, rough places; of the struggle for existence against the harshness of Winter, of all the challenge and invitation of the punishing, spurring North. John Peabody filled his lungs to the limit, his nostrils spreading wide.

"Whoosh!" he exclaimed as he picked up his bag. "Anyhow, this is different—considerably different from the office."

WITH his head bowed against the snow he warily picked his way through the dark toward the red tail-light of the caboose on the logging-train which was to bear him thirty miles northward to Black Bear Lake, the railroad point nearest to the holdings of his Uncle John, whither he was bound.

Above the red tail-light gleamed faint yellow lamp-light from the open door of the caboose, and from within came gust upon gust of bellowed song:

"Come all my brave shanty-boys; I'll sing you a so-o-ong.
If you'll pay good at-tention it won't take me lo-o-ong.
It's a little yarn of what did me be-fall,
While taking a jour-nee——"

"Hello!" The song ceased abruptly as John swung himself out of the darkness into the doorway of the caboose. "All aboo-ard! Dead Snake Limited for Squaw Crick, Split Rock, Travoy Point, Black Bear Lake, all points no-o-orth! Pullman ticket, sir? Pullman's up ahead—side-door. All aboo-ard!"

A dark little broad-shouldered man, standing spread-legged in the center of the tiny caboose, removed his cap and bowed with mock humility as John heaved his bag into a corner.

"Sing on," said John laughing. "Don't let me interrupt. What happened to you 'while taking a jour-nee'? Go ahead! It sounded interesting."

The little broad-shouldered man replaced his cap while a grin split his face.

"Oh, ho! You've been around a little, too, I see," he said with a comical jerk of the head. "Hey, Pete—Pete! Wake up, Pete. Here's our passenger."

In the lower of the two bunks in the caboose there was a slow but mighty upheaval of blankets and a fat, short man sat up rubbing his eyes.

"Whatinell's all the noise 'bout?" he demanded sleepily.

"Passenger's aboard, Pete," snapped the little man. "Come on; get up! Show him your conductor's manners, Pete. Tell him about the time you ran the Overland out of St. Paul."

The fat man continued to rub his eyes. Gradually the sleep was rubbed from them and he sat blinking at John.

"What time is it?" he asked suddenly. "Got a watch?"

John, looking at his timepiece, said that it was twenty minutes past twelve.

"Oh, ho, hum!" The fat man rose, groaning his protests at being disturbed, and stretched himself. "Well, if that's the case we might as well be rambling."

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"You run to Black Bear Lake, don't you?" asked John. "That's where I want to go."

"Yes, and that's where we want to go," interposed the little man. "And we have hopes of going there, but sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. It all depends on this line."

"Ho, hum," repeated the fat man wearily. "Well, I guess we might as well be rambling. Better tell him to go, Jimmy."

Jimmy, the little man, deftly swung himself out of the door to the side of the track.

"All right, Gus," he bawled at the darkness ahead. "Boss says you can go."

Back from the darkness came briskly, "Blamed near time," instantly followed by a tiny toot from the tiny locomotive attached to the string of flat-cars ahead of the caboose; and with a sudden jerk, which threw everything and everybody in the caboose forward and backward, the little train was on its creaking, swaying, jolting way.

The fat man, after having fulfilled his duties as conductor by listening for a few minutes to assure himself that the train really was in motion and that the couplings were holding, rolled comfortably back into his bunk and went promptly to sleep.

"Fine and polite for a conductor, Pete is," grinned the little brakeman, closing the door. "Goes to sleep and leaves me to entertain passengers. And yet Pete says he used to run the Overland—oh, well, it's a fine night for a murder, anyhow. Got a match?"

John had.

"Ain't got a cigar, though, I'll bet?"

"You'd lose," laughed John, handing over the desired article. "What do you say if I smoke it for you, too?"

The enormous grin once more split the brakeman's countenance. As he lighted the cigar and drew in the first whiff of smoke his whole face became wrinkled in an enormous smile.

"Wow!" he said, awe-stricken, regarding the cigar. "That's a ten-center, I'll gamble."

He drew in and blew out three enormous drafts of smoke, pulled up a chair and settled himself as comfortably as the swaying caboose would permit.

"And now," he said, peering through the smoke, "why in the name of howling bobcats does any man who can smoke cigars like this want to go to Black Bear Lake this time of the year? Tain't any of my business, I know, but why?"

John laughed.

"Why, what's the matter with Black Bear Lake?"

"This cigar," said the little man, regarding that article reverently, "this cigar tells me that you're a man who travels in Pullmans, an' eats in the diner, and don't stop at nothing less'n two-dollar-a-day-hotels. That's why I says, 'Why Black Bear Lake?' Ever been there?"

"Never."

"Well, the nearest thing to a two-dollar-a-day house in Bear Lake is the soft side of the floor in the ten by ten depot, and a mess of salt pork and dough-gods at a squaw-man's for two-bits a throw."

"Thanks," said John. "I'm not thinking of stopping there any longer than I can help. I'm going to John Peabody's place, which I understand is in the woods some distance beyond."

The little man instantly removed the cigar from his mouth. The look of curiosity which he had been displaying became one of bewilderment.

"Peabody!" he said. "Going to Peabody Point, eh? Worse and more of it! Black Bear Lake was bad enough, but Peabody Point, at this time of year, for a man who can smoke cigars like this—" the little man shook his head to show that he gave the problem up—"you've got me, Mister; that's something I can't understand. Pete, Pete; wake up, Pete! This fellow ain't satisfied with Black Bear Lake; he's going into the bush—to Peabody Point. Say, pardner, why don't you hit it up for the North Pole and be done with it? Ever been there?"

"Is Peabody Point a town?" asked John.

"Peabody—" the little man waved his cigar in the general direction of the flat-cars ahead—"Peabody Point is where the logs and lumber that loads those cars comes from. Peabody Point is the place where saw-logs grow on the bushes. Is Peabody Point a town? No sir! Peabody Point is only a settlement up there in the bush that's owned and run by the Hookum Chief of this neck of the woods; and that same's old 'Wolf John' Peabody, and don't you forget it!"

"'Wolf John'," repeated young John Peabody. "Sweet little name! Why the 'Wolf'?"

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"Why the 'Wolf'?" The brakeman's grin came back into its own. "Why—say, you're going up there, you say? Going on business?"

"Yes—that is, sort of business."

"Well, any sort of business at all that you do at Peabody Point you'll do with old 'Wolf John' himself; and when you're through with your business you won't have to have anybody tell you why the 'Wolf'!"

"Evidently the old gentleman is something of a character," volunteered John.

" 'Character!' Holy jumping Ju-pee-ter! Hey, Pete—Pete! Wake up, Pete! This fellow calls old 'Wolf John' Peabody a 'character!' 'Character!' Oh please, please say that to 'Wolf John's' face and watch him bite."

"Is it far from Black Bear Lake to Peabody Point?" asked John when the little man was calm again.

" 'Bout thirty miles up the Big Brulé," was the reply. "There's a tote road to go up on. The logs mostly come down the Brulé. Mebbe you can hire a team to take you up. I dunno. The station agent's got a team. Sometimes he takes people out. Mebbe take you; I dunno. But 'character,' you says. Pete, Pete, did you hear that—'character'! Huh! There's politeness for you: Pete's snoring like a donkey-engine.

"Well, you better roll into Lower Six," he continued as he indicated the bunk opposite the one in which the conductor slept blissfully. "No; no sir-ee! Don't think you're robbing me of my berth. No sir, I'm going to sit up and keep this see-gar company as long as it'll last. Goo' night!"

CHAPTER II

THE REASON WHY

JOHN PEABODY stretched himself carelessly on the rude bunk and gave himself up to memories of the circumstances that were sending him for the first time into the Big Woods, to an uncle whom he had never seen, and of whose characteristics he had his first intimation from the garrulous train-man. The thoughts were not pleasant. For John was being sent into the woods after he had been tried in the crucible of cities and found wanting.

"You are a failure," was his tight-lipped father's verdict. "You are worse than a failure; you are a barbarian! You are unfit to fill a place in a civilized community."

His father was Elihu Peabody, head of the genteel and conservative house of E. Peabody & Co., Bankers. A civilized community he considered as one in which men went quietly from quiet homes to quiet offices, transacted the day's business quietly—and profitably—and went quietly home; where every man had as his chief aim in life the noble object of becoming a prominent citizen—and dying rich; and—here came the rub with John—where the sons of men—of prominent citizens, that is—were quietly glad to walk in the ways of their fathers.

His ambition for John was to see him work his way quietly through the various grades to the position of head of the house of E. Peabody & Co.; to be, in time, elected to the presidency of the city's conservative Chamber of Commerce, as was the due of the head of E. Peabody & Co. Even, in time, he had hoped to see John cultivate dignified, gray side-whiskers such as gave his own tight-lipped physiognomy distinction in bankers' conventions. And John—had been a failure!

In the bunk of the pitching caboose John admitted this to himself. He was a failure. He had fallen down on everything that he had tackled. He was twenty-six years old, old enough to have begun to do something; and he had done nothing. Worse than that, he had lost the confidence in himself which is the heritage of youth, and he had begun to accept bitterly his father's expressed opinion that he was no good.

It was not merely that he had failed so ignominiously in his father's office, though that was the final and heaviest blow. He had had plenty of other chances to show if there was anything in him. His father early had recognized his craving for out-of-doors and had treated him accordingly.

First there was that irrigation job in Wyoming. John had hailed with delight his appointment as assistant to the manager of the water-rights company, in which his father was interested, and had shot elk, bear, and cougar with great success, and in company with the small settlers of the valley in which the company operated.

He had become so friendly and popular with these settlers that when he discovered that success and dollars for the water company consisted of preventing the settlers from tapping the streams and ditches which

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it controlled he foolishly told the manager that a man must be a money maniac to want dollars bad enough to ruin a lot of poor farmers to get it; and a peremptory wire from his father jerked him home for his first harsh scolding.

THERE had been other chances, and he had failed in all of them. The place at the steel-mills had consisted mostly in keeping time on several hundred Slav laborers, with the smell of hot slag perpetually polluting the air. With the railroad construction department his job had been storekeeper at various camps, and his books had become wofully muddled.

At last with a "Well, I suppose you are ready to settle down to usefulness," he had been brought back to the city and placed in the office of E. Peabody & Co., to be properly broken in by Babson—Babson, the pudgy, self-important, efficient Office Manager. Babson had given John a desk, a nice, new shiny desk, and a swivel-chair and had warned John to forget for the time being that he was E. P.'s son. John, ungratefully, had stuck his big legs under the desk, had looked around at carefully combed and collared clerks, at the four confining walls of the room, and had laughed—blasphemously!

A trained observer of men, studying young John Peabody as he had lounged in that swivel-chair, would have wondered by what error he found himself before an office desk. The eyes were sufficient to tell that he did not belong. They were as yet the eyes of a boy, fresh, clean and frank; but in them the light of boy-recklessness gleamed with a brightness which suggested the man with just a little too much recklessness, too much adventure-hunger, too much eagerness to take risks, to permit him to become a comfortable, useful member of a business organization.

Likewise, a trained observer of men would have seen that his body, even as it sprawled boyishly over the chair, was the sort of body that Nature creates when it wishes to build a body fit to withstand the sudden, strenuous physical demands incidental to an adventurous, even a reckless existence.

Babson had looked upon John's proportions as an affront to his little adding-machine gods. Babson, the self-important, at once took it upon himself to tame the brute. Twenty years' experience in one office makes for expertness in petty nagging. John had smiled good-naturedly, and still good-naturedly had wondered just how long he could keep the lid on, how long before Babson's nagging would pester him to an explosion.

HE HAD stood it three weeks to a day. One blustery December morning Babson, having had a bad breakfast, cast his eyes in the direction of John, seeking to find some excuse for making the big brute the object of a grouch-clearing outburst. A few seconds later, his puffy face purple with rage, he was standing beside John's desk while that young man was comfortably puffing at a villainous pipe and reading the sporting page of a newspaper! Then it had come.

"Do I have to go to your father about you? Are you such a baby that you have to fall back upon your position as your father's son? Aren't you man enough—aren't you able——"

Had Babson possessed eyes wherewith to see, he would have noted the strange flash in young Peabody's eyes. But he was blind with the blindness of twenty years of self-importance, and he went on to his doom.

"If you are no man—if you can not stand on your own feet—if you are such a baby——"

That was as far as he got. One of John's vulgarly big arms fell on him with the grip of an anaconda. Babson squealed once as the iron-like muscles gripped his pudginess. A chair overturned noisily as John arose. The office gasped.

"Harker," said Elihu Peabody in his private office to his secretary, "will you be kind enough to see what that noise means out in the office?"

Harker flew out on rubber heels. A moment later he flew back, his face horror-stricken at having beheld such a scene as he never had dreamed of beholding in all his clerkly existence.

"Well, Harker?"

"It's—it's Mr. John, Mr. Peabody," stammered Harker. "He—he's holding Mr. Babson's head under—under the water-cooler!"

In his caboose bunk John smiled as this scene pictured itself to him. But the smile vanished when he recalled the interview

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with his father in the library at home the evening after this incident. There was no hint of father and son in Peabody Senior's words or expression that evening. He was dealing with a failure, a thing he abhorred.

"You may read that," he said icily, pushing across the library table a letter written in a huge, penciled scrawl. He did not look at the letter or at John.

John read:

Peabody Point, Sept. 25th.

BROTHER ELIHU:

How are you fixed for boys? It seems I remember you wrote once you had one. I have not been lucky—or unlucky—enough to get any kids of my own. If I had a young male of my own kin—a man with man's bones in him—with me now I would not leave him a poor man when it comes my time to go, which, I am informed, may not be long away. But it would have to be a real man, one of the stiff-boned Peabody breed, not a lady-like city weakling like yourself, Elihu. Don't trouble to write to me unless by accident you have such a son—which I don't suppose you have—and he should happen to care for a man's work in a man's country. JOHN.

Elihu Peabody spoke at the table when John, having read, looked across at him.

"That letter is from your Uncle John, as you may be intelligent enough to surmise. Your Uncle John is little better than a savage. He takes after the paternal side of the family, probably after the Peabody who disgraced the family by being hanged for piracy. I am glad to say that the useful members of the family inherit from the maternal side.

"Twenty-five years ago he proved himself unfit to hold a place in a civilized community and went up into the woods, to live with coarse woodsmen and Indians, I suppose, and to make a miserable living at logging. You will notice that his letter is dated in September. I had no intention of replying to it until your barbaric outbreak this morning, which of course marked you as unfit for the world of civilization.

"Ten minutes after your miserable conduct I had telegraphed to your Uncle John to find out if he still was of the mind indicated in his letter. I have just received this reply. You of course can expect nothing more from me. You are also of course at liberty to do as you please. I will say, however, that in my opinion you are comparable to your Uncle John for inefficiency, uncouthness, barbarism and failure."

The telegram which he proffered John was a single line.

Yes, let the pup come if he's man enough to get here.

John read it twice.

"All right, sir," he said, "if you don't mind I'll start north in the morning."

And his father had bowed stiffly—had bowed out of the room. John's jaw set as he thought of it. Of what lay before him he knew nothing, but any place now was better than home.

THE caboose rumbled on and on, and to and fro, its progress slow and wrought with much pain and turmoil. It crawled at snail's pace around carelessly banked curves, and it leaped clankingly over wide gaps in the rails. In time its many movements and noises blended in a soothing whole, and despite his thoughts and the oddness of his condition John fell asleep. He was awakened in the broad light of day by the brakeman shaking him and calling loudly:

"Black Bear Lake! For a man who smokes the kind of cigars that goes with two-dollar-a-day hotels, you certainly can make yourself to home wherever your hat drops, brother," he volunteered as John sat up and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "I was just telling the station-agent about you. Told him you wanted to go up to Peabody Point. 'All right,' he sez, 'the walkin' is fine.'" The brakeman rubbed his chin, eying John with a puzzled if not suspicious expression. "I guess you better go see that station-agent yourself. He says he's heard about you."

"Heard about me?" queried John sleepily. "Where from?"

"From old 'Wolf John' himself," was the insinuating reply.

CHAPTER III

THE GIRL IN THE WILDERNESS

A MORNING as dazzling and stimulating as ever dawned over the North Woods greeted John Peabody as, bag in hand, he came tumbling from the little caboose on to the station platform at Black Bear Lake.

The storm had stopped during the night. From a cloudless, breezeless sky the morning Winter sun shone rosily upon a world blanketed under six inches of dry, powdered snow. The covering of dazzling white took

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to itself tints from the golden sun, shooting back its rays in a fashion which made John pause and blink in pain.

Out of the door of the red, box-like "depot" a bleary-eyed man poked his head, warily studied John for a moment, then hastily withdrew inside and slammed the door. Across the track from the station John made out a long log-cabin bearing an unpainted board above the door on which was scrawled in red paint, "Eeting Housse."

An Indian squaw, digging in the snow beside the door, loaded her arms with stovewood and waddled clumsily into the cabin. A nondescript Indian dog, darting out between the squaw's legs, romped up to the track and barked furiously at the new arrival. Beyond this, Black Bear Lake displayed no more signs of life than the charred, burned-over woods about it.

John filled his lungs with the sharp air and looked about him.

Miserable and depressing Black Bear Lake was, but all about it there lay the suggestion of the large spaces, the freedom, the big, man-thing that his nature had craved during his confinement in the office. With a smile on his lips, confident that his Uncle John had sent word to the station-agent to forward him on his way, he breezily entered the station.

"Good morning," he said, walking up to the tiny wired-off cubby-hole in one corner of the single room. "Jimmy the brakeman tells me that my uncle, John Peabody, has sent you some word for me."

The man behind the wire screen was small and worn looking. He wore glasses over which he peered coldly at John.

"What's yer name?" he demanded testily.

John told him.

"Huh! Any relation to Mr. Peabody?"

"I'm his nephew," said John. "Hasn't he sent——"

"Yes, he has!" snarled the man with a petty creature's delight in inflicting a hurt. "He's sent word for me to look out for an impostor who's trying to pass himself off as his nephew by using his name, and he's sent word that if anybody down here helps you to get up to Peabody Point he'll come down and skin 'em alive. That's the word Mr. Peabody has sent down for you, young feller; and my advice to you is to get right back the way you come and not try to fool us folks around here. If you do, you'll find yourself climbing trees to get out of our reach. You hear me now: that's all the word I've got for you. Now you git out!"

A cannon-ball stove in the middle of the room crackled loudly in the silence that followed. John Peabody stood staring dumbly into the face of the man behind the screen.

"Did my uncle say he didn't want me to go up to Peabody Point?" he asked in amazement.

"Your uncle!" sneered the agent. "Ain't I told you we're on to you here? I've told you what he said—said he'd skin anybody alive who helped you get up there."

"Did he say he didn't want me to come?" repeated John a little warmly.

The agent paused in his pretended business and shot out his unshaven chin.

"Ain't I told you what he said? Those were his very words! Phoned 'em to me and made me write 'em down and repeat 'em so I'd be sure to have 'em right. Now you better be 'long your business or I'll show you."

Into John's eyes there came a trace of the flash that had preceded the wetting of Babson, but he turned away.

"I see," he said evenly. "You've got nerve enough to talk to me that way because Mr. Peabody has told you to turn me down. All right, old man. I'll be coming back this way some time, and if I don't spank you good and hard it will be because you're not here. So long. I'll see you later."

Outside he hunted up the cheery little brakeman.

"Do you know what sort of word that agent had for me?" he asked.

"Sure," said the little man. There was a noticeable chill in his manner. "Sure, I know. And don't you think for a minute I'm going to disobey old 'Wolf John's' orders by helping you none either. I ain't got anything ag'in' you, brother, and you're certainly generous with your cigars, but what 'Wolf John' says goes in this neck of the bush, and—you'll excuse me."

"Hold on! Can't you even tell me where I can get somebody to take me up to Peabody Point?"

The brakeman debated a moment.

"Yes, I can tell you that, 'cause that won't be helping you none. The agent there, he's the only man who's got a team around here. Can't you get that? No? Thought not. Well, pardner, that's the only

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team of any kind for hire around here."

John looked at the white gash of a road that ran straight northward through the burned timber, as far as the eye could see.

"Is that the road to Peabody Point?" he asked, holding out another cigar. "Go on, you can tell me that; that won't be helping me. Besides nobody is looking."

The brakeman nodded and reached for the cigar all in one second.

"Yep. Thirty miles of it. Can't miss it. And now—excuse me!"

As if afraid of volunteering any more of the forbidden information, he hurried down the track out of hearing.

JOHN made his way across the track into the eating-house. It was a harsh reception that had been accorded him, and he was left in black doubts as to his uncle's exact attitude toward him. But his healthy young stomach, spurred by the brisk air, demanded food. Once fed he could decide what to do.

One long, oilcloth-covered table, surrounded by half a dozen chairs, completed the furniture of the eating-house. A greasy-looking white man, evidently the proprietor, motioned John into one of the chairs and bawled something unintelligible in the general direction of a rear partition.

In a short time the squaw whom John had observed in the act of digging stove-wood from the snow came out bearing in one hand a plate covered with biscuits and fried salt pork, in the other a huge tin cup of steaming coffee. It was anything but appetizing fare, but his experiences had taught John that it was undoubtedly the best and only that the place afforded.

"I'm on my way to Peabody Point," he said, as he tasted his coffee. "I'm willing to pay generously to be taken out there. Do you know of anybody who has a team for hire?"

The white man, lighting a villainous cob pipe, regarded John with a look of ridicule.

"So you're the fellow who's passing himself off as 'Wolf John's' nephew, be you?" he growled. "Well, we've got word ahead of you. No, I don't know of any team you can hire. I don't know anything. And if I'd known it was you, you'd never got a bite of vittles in this place."

John devoted himself to his unsavory breakfast for a space.

"You're a friendly lot of people up here, aren't you?" he said pleasantly. "Is Mr. Peabody such a terrible man that you all jump when he whistles?"

The man smoked on, debating this remark. Finally he spoke.

"D'you know 'Wolf John'?"

"No."

"Ever see him?"

"No."

"When you do—" puff, puff—"if you ever do—" puff—"you'll know—" puff, puff, puff—"why you ain't going to get any help—" puff, puff—"outer me."

Having delivered himself thus, the man suddenly held out his hand.

"That'll be two bits," he said curtly.

John handed him a dollar.

"And six bits for keeping my bag until I send for it," he said.

The man stared, first at the dollar in his palm, then at the bag on the floor, then at John.

"You—ain't planning to go up to the Point anyhow, be you?" he stammered.

"I am."

"How you going?"

"I suppose I'll have to walk."

After a pause the man slipped the dollar into his pocket.

"I reckon I can keep your war-bag for you, all right," he said ruminatively. "Sure I can. That ain't helping you get to the Point no way 'tall."

Suddenly, as if recalling something, he picked up the bag and strode behind the rear partition.

"Remember," he called back, "I ain't helped you no way 'tall."

Left alone John finished his breakfast with no waste of time and, glad to leave the odorous eating-house, hurried out into the open air. He was sorely puzzled. What was Uncle John's idea? Had he repented of his invitation? Did he intend this harsh reception as a hint to his nephew that he wasn't wanted? Did he want to turn him back?

John stood outside the eating-house door and pondered these questions. He could see the weazened station-agent peering at him from a window. From the engine he saw Jimmy the brakeman, the fat conductor and an engineer and fireman regarding him out of the cab windows, and he had no doubt that the squaw-man, from some hiding-place, was studying him at leisure. But nobody made a move to come to him,

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or to so much as speak to him. Even the Indian dog, playing along the track, kept at a distance and growled tentatively.

"I am about as popular here as a leper," ruminated John, "and all thanks to my Uncle John."

He felt something warm rush into his throat as he thought of how his present condition had come about. It was his Uncle John's fault. It was all due to him. Young John's eyes gleamed suddenly with the light of boy-recklessness as he thought of it.

His Uncle John was responsible for this fix. Maybe Uncle John had done it because he didn't care to see his nephew. Maybe Uncle John would deal out a reception even more chilly than the one he had prepared at Black Bear Lake. Well, in that case he was going to have his chance before that day was over; because, young John vowed as he buttoned up his overcoat and put on his gloves, his nephew was going up to Peabody Point to ask his uncle face to face why he had given his invited nephew such a scurvy reception.

THE snow lay hard and white all over; the gash in the burned timber ran northward straight before his eyes; and the sun and air were a compound which whipped the blood around to the last red corpuscle. Thirty miles of it, Jimmy had said, and he couldn't miss it. About eight hours' walking! Young John Peabody took a long breath and set out on his way to Peabody Point at a pace that made the station-agent hope that he wasn't a man who always kept his word.

Puzzled and filled with doubts as John was, a few miles of brisk walking in the sharp air sent his naturally high spirits leaping. He kicked the dry snow high in the air, he leaped pitch-holes as he came to them, and he chuckled as he strode on. No matter what his reception would be at Peabody Point he was living to his finger-tips during this morning's walk, and he refused to let any doubts for the future spoil his enjoyment of his own perfect masculine health and the perfect morning.

Five miles out of town the burned-over timber ceased abruptly and gave way to a swamp. The tote-road ran for several miles over corduroys, then swerved from the swamp and mounted a ridge which to John, standing at the foot of it and looking up, seemed high enough and bleak enough to be the backbone of the world, and which ran northward farther than he could see.

On the level, where the snow lay evenly and tightly packed, the walking had been a pleasure. Now it was a different story. The ridge was rough and exposed to the winds from miles of marshland. In spots the ground was bare; in other places snowdrifts three and four feet high barred the way.

At twelve o'clock John threw himself down in a bare nook and admitted that he had had plenty. Athlete that he was, the uneven going and the pace he had set had tired him. His stomach was crying for food, and so far as any signs were to be seen he was doomed to go on to Peabody Point before a meal was obtainable.

He rested half an hour and went on. A few miles farther along the road dipped down the ridge into a stretch of pine timber. With joy he soon espied a log cabin in a clearing by the roadside and hurried toward it in hope of purchasing food. The cabin door was padlocked and the place had the air of having been deserted for months.

Once more the road rose on to a bleak ridge and once more there were drifts to fight through. It was in the middle of the afternoon now and the rapidly dropping sun began to warn John that Winter days are short in the North. Since leaving Black Bear Lake in the morning he had marched steadily without seeing a single human being. A few whisky-jacks which flew noisily from the roadway at his approach, and a snowshoe rabbit loping away into one of the swamps, were the only signs of life that had passed before his eyes.

He began to be assailed with loneliness and doubts. Was it possible that such a lonesome road could be the way to Peabody Point? Hadn't Jimmy misdirected him? Hadn't he gone astray? From what he had heard, Peabody Point was a considerable settlement. Wouldn't there be teams passing from it to Black Bear Lake? John shivered a little as mile after mile of desolation and wilderness passed beneath his feet and no signs of human habitation met his eye. Where did this eternal road lead to? Was there anything at the end of it? Or did it merely run deeper into the wilderness?

It was three in the afternoon, and John, in disgust, through having walked seven hours without knowing whither he went, and going

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at a pace that was little short of a stagger, was descending the western slope of a ridge where the road once more ran down to an expanse of marsh, when, in the complete silence and loneliness, the crack of a heavy revolver struck his ears. John's heart leaped with genuine relief. Where there was revolver-shooting there must be a human being, and anybody, even the station-agent at Black Bear Lake, would have been welcome to John at that moment.

As he paused to locate the direction of the shot there came slinking from a clump of tamaracks in the marsh a long gray shape which, with its belly close to the ground, seemed to glide like a shadow across the snow.

Almost simultaneously with its appearance came another spiteful crack and the big timber-wolf with a snarl of white teeth leaped into the air, fell, snarling and spitting, into the snow and, yowling hideously, began to drag itself away. Almost as it struck the ground from the tamaracks came four shots more, each shot following the other so swiftly that he scarcely could count them.

At the fourth shot of this volley the wolf's legs suddenly shot out taut and the animal lay still, shot through the head. There was a pushing aside of branches among the tamaracks, then out of the brush glided on long skis a figure which, in that desolation, caused John to gasp and stare!

IT WAS a young girl, tall and slim and supple! She was dressed in a single garment of sealskin; loose trousers taking the place of a skirt; the cap made as part of the coat; and heavy moosehide moccasins laced around her ankles. Her cap was thrown carelessly back upon her neck as she emerged from the tamaracks, and as he stared John's wonder grew; for the face and head thus revealed were regally beautiful in themselves; were all the more beautiful in contrast with her rough attire. Fastened to her left wrist by a thong dragged a ski-staff, and in her gloved hands, reloading as she glided toward the dead wolf, was a gold-plated, man's-size six-shooter.

"You got him!" cried John, exploding in relief at sight of some one. "Good shot!"

She whirled around, startled at finding herself not alone, and there was that in her lithe, swift movements which told of the strength and grace which her novel garment hid.

"Don't shoot!" he laughed, thrusting his hands in the air. "I'll come down."

And down the ridge he came, leaping boyishly, to where she stood, now entirely self-possessed. She looked at him frankly, appraising him without diffidence, measuring him from toe to eyes with a single glance; and John was conscious that her eyes were brown and wonderfully calm, and that great braids of brown hair were coiled thick upon her head. The blood was leaping in her frost-reddened cheeks, her eyes sparkled, and she smiled.

"Good shot," she said quietly. "Surely you don't call that—six shots—good shooting?"

"I—I thought it was pretty good," stammered John in confusion. "Revolver shooting—at a running wolf—you must shoot a lot if you don't call it good shooting to make a hit at all."

The girl slipped the weapon away, out of sight in an inside holster near her belt.

"No, I never shoot at game if I can help it," she said with a remorseful glance at the wolf. "I wouldn't carry this gun, but I'm not permitted to go alone in the woods without it. I wish I hadn't had it today; then I wouldn't have touched this poor thing. He couldn't help what he was doing, I suppose; it's their nature to feed on rabbits. But when I saw him getting ready to leap on a pair of poor little snowshoe rabbits that were playing so happily in the brush back there I had to do something.

"I shouted, but the rabbits were bewildered and sat right up straight; and the wolf was leaping, and I had to fire. Then after I'd wounded the poor thing I had to finish it. It seems cruel, the whole thing; but the poor little rabbits are so helpless and—cute."

John nodded gravely. He was at first amazed at having this queenly stranger speak to him so confidentially, but before she had ended her explanation quiet womanliness in her voice and words had made him feel nearly as much at ease as herself. And she was as much at home there in the wilderness as another woman might be on her carefully barbered front lawn.

"It's just a case of taking the little fellow's part," he said. "We've got to do that

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every time or we don't feel right afterward."

She looked at him with real pleasure and relief in her eyes.

"I'm glad to hear some one say that," she said, still in her quiet, easy tones. "That's just what it is, isn't it? We feel that we must care for the helpless." She stopped abruptly. Her sharp eyes had noticed his shoes—heavy, capable walking-shoes on city pavements, but wofully inadequate in snow-filled woods. "Why! Aren't your feet wet and cold in those shoes?" she concluded in real concern.

As a matter of fact, John's feet had some hours ago passed into a stage of numbness in which it was impossible to tell whether they were wet or cold, warm or dry.

"I suppose they are," he said with a rueful glance at her heavy moccasins. "You see, I didn't know just what I'd find up here and I didn't come prepared for a long walk."

"You shouldn't have gone out in the snow with such light shoes," she said with a disapproving shake of her head. "You just hurry and change as soon as possible or you may have frozen toes, you know."

SHE spoke authoritatively, as if she were daily accustomed to telling big, grown men what to do to take care of themselves. She was pulling her sealskin cap up over her crown of dark hair, snapping the carbine on to a ring fastened in her belt, and settling her feet more firmly in the ski-straps as she spoke.

"I hope to change—as soon as I get to Peabody Point—if I ever do," laughed John.

Her eyes widened.

"Are you on your way to Peabody Point?" she asked eagerly. "Are you the man Uncle John has been expecting?"

It was John's turn to open his eyes.

"Your Uncle John?" he stammered.

"Yes. My Uncle John; Mr. Peabody, you know."

"Is Mr. Peabody your uncle?" He was going to say, "too," but checked himself. "I didn't know he had a niece."

"He's not my real uncle," she said. "I just call him Uncle John."

"I guess I must be the man he's expecting," admitted John. "At least I know he's expecting me."

The girl looked at him now with mingled amazement, criticism and admiration in her look.

"Have you walked all the way from Black Bear Lake in those shoes?"

John nodded guiltily.

"Then we'd better hurry home so you can get a change right away," she said swiftly. "You follow me; I'll show you a short cut. It's five miles from here by the road, and only about two miles my way, across the marsh." She glided suddenly away, then paused in confusion. "Pardon me; I'll go slow," she called back. "But you must hurry as much as you can or you'll have frozen feet."

"I can run two miles if that's all it is," he said.

"Can you really?" she queried. "After walking all the way from the Lake?"

"Well, I was about all in a minute ago, but I feel good for it now," he said. "Go ahead; I'll try to keep up."

So, with the lithe figure of the girl gliding ahead on her skis, and with John grimly swinging his numbed feet into something resembling a run, they set out over the white, frozen marsh toward where, in the clear, quiet Winter air, there arose above the timber-line of a low-lying ridge tiny columns of blue haze, smoke from the chimneys of Peabody Point.

He was tired and cold, weary, and weak from hunger. Alone he would have staggered along dully as he had been doing for the last three miles. Now his weariness, the dragging deadness of the monotonous journey, had vanished.

The woman led, and he followed. He ran at a pace he could scarcely believe possible after his weariness. He ran eagerly, as if he feared that her light, easy gliding would carry her away from him. And as he looked again and again at the free, graceful figure before him he wished that he had not been so confounded ignorant on the subject of shoes.

He was well winded when she had zigzagged to the top of the ridge and stood waiting for him to catch up. She stood above him and looked down. The light of the setting sun was about her like an aureole, and as she smiled he labored up the hill and stood in the sunlight beside her.

"There it is," she said, sweeping her fur-clad arm toward the valley beyond. "That's Uncle John's—Peabody Point."

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CHAPTER IV

"WOLF JOHN"

PEABODY POINT lay at the foot of the ridge like a checker-board before them. It lay on a broad, lake-like pond of a dammed river. A half-dozen large mill buildings faced the river-front. A space behind them was given up to lumber-yards.

A street, possibly two city blocks long, including shops, stores and an office building, faced the yards, and back from this street in orderly fashion were ranged twoscore small white dwelling-houses, and behind all, on a knoll which overlooked every house in the settlement, was a large, low house, built in heavy bungalow style, obviously the home of the over-lord of the settlement.

Beyond the knoll, in a half-moon encircling the settlement, rose a belt of majestic Norway pines, the smaller trees and underbrush cleared away, the great smooth trunks rising from the snow like the woods of some ancient, carefully tended park. Beyond this stretched the vast panorama of the Big Woods, mile after mile of green-black timber, covering all the world even unto the brass-tinted western horizon.

"By George!" cried John, and stood silent, spellbound by the scene.

"Yes; isn't it fine!" said the girl at his side.

Her outflung arm seemed to embrace it all: the hard, clean sky; the brassy sun, the black timber-line of the far-away horizon; the snow-covered pond and river; the woods; the whole great white out-of-doors. She drew the glorious air—air as fresh and unpolluted as when the world was young—into her lungs until her figure lifted itself, buoyant, on tiptoes.

Down in the big Norways a wastrel sunset breeze set the heavy boughs to murmuring softly.

"Ah! Hear that? It makes me feel so good—so safe and at home to hear them. They seem so—Oh, reassuring."

He looked at her doubtfully.

"Reassuring?" he repeated. "They sound and look rather grim and forbidding to me."

"Then you're new to the woods? That's why. Well, I suppose they are formidable unless one is at home in them. Now, we mustn't waste any more time before you get a change for your feet," she continued swiftly. "See the square white building at this end of the street? That's Uncle John's office. You'd better hurry right down there now. I'm going along the ridge toward the knoll, so I can slide down toward that big house—that's home."

"I want to thank you—thank you for showing me the way," he stammered. "I hope——"

"Oh, that's all right," she laughed as she glided away. "But do hurry and get a change; frozen toes are no fun at all."

He obeyed promptly, dropping down the ridge at a good pace, and looking back occasionally at her as she slid diagonally down the hill toward the house on the knoll. Then she disappeared from his sight, and he hurried on toward the square white office building, wondering what sort of a reception might be awaiting him. He had sensed by this time that his Uncle John must be an unusual sort of man. In what manner would he receive his nephew? A flash of recklessness came to John as he stood on the office threshold. With his jaw set he carelessly flung open the door and strode in.

Then he knew why the men at Black Bear Lake had so faithfully obeyed his Uncle John's strange orders.

AN OLD man sat behind a large flat desk near the center of the room. Though the room was large and fitted with other desks and office appliances, though three clerks were busy at their work, though the walls of the room were covered with mounted heads of moose, deer, bear, wolves, lynx and bobcats, all that John saw was the old man behind the large flat desk.

He dominated the room. There was something of the proportions, the ruggedness, the permanence of the great brown pines about him. He must have been a giant in his prime. He was still a big man, but he seemed shrunken, as if recently age had too deeply tapped the life forces within him.

His hair was snow-white and as thick as the hair of a young man. The heavy, outjutting eyebrows were white; white tufts of hair portruded from the ears. The clean-shaven face was sadly shrunken; but still huge, square, and rugged, it was the forefront of an indomitable will.

Beneath the shaggy brows gleamed a

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pair of small eyes so filled with fire that instantly John understood why men called this man "Wolf John." For it was his Uncle John who sat before him. He knew it the moment he opened the door. Lord and master over this domain, over all men near him in spite of his depleted powers, was written all over him.

He looked straight across the desk at the intruder, and John looked back. For many seconds they eyed each other without speaking, but in that time their wills held converse that made introductions, greetings, explanations unnecessary. Finally the old man spoke, his voice filling the room with the suddenness of heavy rifle-shots.

"Well you're a sizable chunk of whelp-meat, anyhow! If I didn't know and respect your mother I'd say you never sprung from Elihu. Stop it!" As John began to bridle.

"Don't bring any silly notions of propriety up here. Now, what do you want of me?" he continued, raising his voice to a querulous roar. "Don't you know *I* came up here to get away from your kind of a world? Can't you and your father leave me alone?" He had apparently forgotten his letters. "Why does Elihu have to go and send you up here after all these years? We've never played at being kin since we parted, twenty-five years ago. What do you want up here, eh?"

By this time he was leaning across the desk, his two great arms folded like bear-paws on the shiny surface. His splendid head was thrust forward menacingly, and beneath the white brows the terrible eyes were gleaming with added fire.

But also by this time John had recovered from the amazement into which the first sight of his uncle had plunged him, and the rising warmth in his throat warned him that he was growing angry. He thought of the letter his uncle had written, and grew more angry. He glared back at the fierce old man, unabashed; his big jaw set firmly, the light of boy-recklessness leaped happily into his eyes.

He paused, struggling to tone down the answer that leaped to his lips, but before he could speak his uncle had read his thoughts as plainly as if they had been put in so many words. The old man leaned back. He did not smile, his set expression only relaxed, and in the fierce eyes there was a flash of comprehension and appreciation.

"Boy," he growled, rising and throwing out his hand, "you should have been my son. Shake hands. Hah!" as John answered his bear-like grasp. "Where in the devil did you get a grip like that in a city? Sit down."

He carelessly indicated a chair at his side and reseated himself abruptly.

"Now," he continued, resuming his threatening manner, "who helped you get up here from Black Bear Lake?"

John related faithfully his experiences at the station, the refusal of assistance by agent, brakeman and squaw-man.

"So there was nothing to do but turn back or walk out here," he concluded, "so I walked; and a few miles out I met a young girl who called you 'Uncle John,' and she took me here by a short cut."

"Belle," said the old man, boring him through with his gleaming eyes. "So you did get some help after all. Belle. Huh! Queer she should be the one to help you."

He rose suddenly, flung on a fur cap and picked up a huge, black cane. Old man though he was, and obviously unwell, he moved with a quickness and suppleness that excited John's surprise and admiration.

"Come on up to the house," he growled, stalking out of the office without so much as a look toward John or the clerks.

With long, quick strides he led the way by a raised boardwalk up the knoll to the big house overlooking the settlement. He panted heavily and occasionally pressed his hand to his left side as if in pain. The nearer they approached to the house the greater became John's amazement at beholding such a structure there in the wilderness.

THE house was more like a wood's home of wealth than the home of a logging-master. Along the full length of the front was a wide veranda, the pillars being unbarked trunks of pine easily three feet in diameter. The walls likewise were builded of massive logs, unbarked but varnished, with large plate-glass windows set in at frequent intervals. At the door the old man stopped abruptly and swung around.

"What's your name?" he growled.

"John."

"John what?"

"John Martin."

"Yes, yes; go on."

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"Why, Peabody, of course."

"Yes, yes. And you are kin to me?"

"To the best of my knowledge you're my uncle," said John, puzzled.

"Well—I'm not!" the words came short and cruel. "Your name isn't Peabody. You're not my nephew. You're not going to find your way smoothed here by any plea of kinship. No. Here is your fix: you're nobody here. Your name here is—is Mud. Just Mud—Jack Mud! Remember that. You get just the same treatment as anybody else. May be a little worse. All right then; come on into the house—Mud!"

Without troubling to observe how John received this novel announcement, apparently not caring whether he followed, the old logging-king stamped into the hall which divided the house in two and flung open the door leading to a small, book-lined room on the right.

"Belle!" he bawled in an attempt at gentleness. "Oh, ho, Belle, my girl! Come a-running. Come in—Mud. Sit down—Mud."

Without looking at John he hurled his cap and cane into a corner and stood listening, rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

"Oh, ho, Uncle John!" came the clear voice of the girl from across the hall, and running in she threw herself into the old man's arms.

She had changed to a dark, closely-fitting dress, and John saw that despite her girlishness she was a woman grown.

"That's the ticket!" cried the old man, holding her up as if she were a tiny child so she might dutifully peck at his cheek. "Always my little Belle, aren't you?" Abruptly, and with a sudden vanishing of this display of tenderness, he set her down. "Belle Peabody, this is Mr. Mud, Mr. John Mud. You met him on the road I understand."

"Yes, Uncle John. I was shooting at a wolf."

"Did you get him?"

"Yes."

"Did you send somebody after the scalp?"

"Yes, Uncle John; old Pierre has gone."

"That's the ticket, girl," exclaimed the old man, rubbing his hands gleefully. "Fifteen dollars bounty on wolf-scalps. Never waste anything; that's the ticket. All right, Belle," he concluded, dismissing her. "I just wanted to introduce you to Mr. Mud. You'll probably see more of him. Be sure to remember his name—John Mud. Oh, wait a minute, Belle. Have the girl lay an extra plate for dinner. He's going to eat with us, Mud is—this evening."

As she went lightly from the room old Peabody's eyes followed her with a tenderness in his gaze of which John never would have dreamed him capable.

"COME here!" commanded the old man sharply the instant the door had closed on Belle. "Look at this."

With slow fumbling movements in strong contrast to his usual swift, certain action he drew from his breast pocket a flat morocco case, much worn, and pressed the catch.

"Look at that," he said softly.

The faded photograph of a pretty young woman lay in the case. She was dressed in styles of a bygone generation, but John found himself wondering if he had not seen the photograph's original some place.

"Belle's mother," continued his uncle softly. "Should have been my wife. Had married another man before I met her. Young fools! Both dead many years now, the man who cheated me, and—and her. I took little Belle. Her name, too—well!" With a growl as he snapped the case shut. "What are you standing there staring at me like a gawk for? Never see a woman's photograph before?"

There was no opportunity for John to reply. As well attempt conversation in the teeth of a roaring storm. Back into the inside pocket went the precious case. The old Wolf flung himself into a large easy chair before a fireplace.

"Sit down," he growled, poking viciously at the fire which had been lighted in preparation for his coming.

John meant to speak of the letter to his father, but his uncle gave him no time.

"Well, Mud," he said, swinging on John with something like a grin breaking the iron lines of his mouth, "I suppose you think you came up here on sort of a holiday, didn't you? Well, you didn't! Not any more than you came to play pampered nephew to yours truly.

"Men work up here in the Big Bush, or they don't eat. I can tell by the build of you that you like to tuck away a man's-size

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meal about three times a day. All right. Every man's entitled to that—if he earns 'em. If you eat 'em up here you'll earn 'em, just the same as everybody else in the woods. You'll earn 'em by using that big, thick body of yours—probably the first time it's been used for anything but play since you were born. Eat all the meals you can stow away, Mud; that's my rule—but earn every crum of 'em."

He threw the tongs on the bricks with a clang.

"You'll go out to Main Camp to-night—" a grim, pleased twinkle showed in his eyes—"to get broken in under Bart. Oh, ho, Belle!" he bellowed in the general direction of the hallway. "Call up the office," he continued as Belle came running in. "Tell 'em to send Bull Bart here at once."

"Bart's here, Uncle John," said the girl. "He came to bring me a copper head-band that he'd bought from an old squaw near Main Camp."

The old man looked at her steadily for several seconds, his gaze questioning hers, but Belle seemed oblivious to his scrutiny.

"Shall I send him in to you?" she asked.

"Yes."

Her uncle had turned and was looking thoughtfully into the fire. John noticed that his face seemed gray and older than it had a few minutes before.

"Yes. Send him in, and tell him to bring that Indian trinket with him."

CHAPTER V

THE KING'S JACKAL

TO JOHN, Bart did not seem to enter the room after the manner of ordinary men. There was no sound of a door opening or closing. Bart seemed to appear suddenly with his back to the closed door. So swift and silent were his movements that there was no sound to announce his coming.

At first glance John thought he was one of the finest specimens of manhood he had ever laid eyes on. Bart was John's size, but looked bigger. Close, curly black hair covered his head and a curly black mustache partly covered his mouth. The face at first glance was handsome. There was a dashing, devil-may-care about its expression that at first was attractive.

On closer scrutiny, however, the favorable impression disappeared. The handsomeness of the features, the brightness of the expression, became only a mask. Behind them loomed the real man: cold, determined, cruel, sneering, ruthless. The big jaw was deeply cleft in the middle; the thin lips had a sinister curl. The eyes were set too closely together, too far up under the overhanging brow. The neck of the man obtruded itself into this second glance, thick and round, seeming to be a continuation of enormous muscles sweeping from the shoulders to the ears, and, with its suggestion of animalism, easily explaining the nickname Wolf John had given him.

Bart seemed to take in John and his uncle with one single look. He stood before the door poised as if prepared to be instantly on his way again. He looked as if he were set for a leap. In his right hand was an ancient copper head-band, hammered out possibly by some Indian artist in the remote days when the Indians worked the copper mines about Lake Superior.

"I'll take that trinket, Bart," said Wolf John icily. "Belle Peabody is not accepting presents from anybody but myself. Hand it over."

For a flash the eyes of the two men met; then with a smile of great self-satisfaction, as if this incident were nothing to him, Bart placed the ornament in his employer's outstretched hand. Peabody nodded, tossed the band in a corner and said—

"When do you start for Main Camp?"

"As soon as the tote-wagon is loaded and the horses through feeding. About an hour," said Bart easily.

"Good. This man," he indicated John with a thumb thrown over his shoulder, "is going with you. His name's Mud—Jack Mud. He couldn't get along in the city, so he's going to try the woods. You're to break him in—as you see fit."

Bart nodded, looking swiftly at John as if he wished to see through him. John felt the man's gaze like a blow of a fist, but he looked back in his usual unperturbed fashion. There was instant suspicion in Bart's look, and dislike.

"Where's your turkey?" he demanded. "Your war-bag—your duds," he continued swiftly, seeing that John did not understand.

"I had to leave my bag down at Black Bear Lake," said John. "I walked out and it was too heavy to carry."

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Bart threw a questioning look at his employer.

"Oh, pick him out an outfit at the wannigan, Bart," said Wolf John easily. "He can't go into any camp of mine wearing a white collar." He looked John over appraisingly, and as he noted more closely the young man's excellent proportions his expression indicated a certain grudging admiration. "I guess that you stand about five feet ten and weigh about a hundred and eighty stripped, don't you, Mud?"

"Five feet ten and a half, and a hundred and eighty-two in condition. I'm a little overweight now."

"Hah! Bart, you hear? He's a little overweight now. Overweight isn't healthy. I'm particular about the health of my men. See that you train him down, Bart." He looked quizzically from one to the other. "That's about your height and heft, ain't it, Bart? Pick him out a complete outfit same's for yourself. And charge it against him—name of Mud, Jack Mud."

Bart nodded curtly and was gone as noiselessly and swiftly as he had come. The old man rubbed his hands.

"THERE'S a man, Mud," he said, smiling grimly. "He was a rat when he came into the bush here. Half crazy with whisky and with the soles worn off his shoes—five years ago it was. I suppose he had broken jail some place, or was running from some sheriff. Look at him now. I made him. That's why I put him in charge of my jobs; he's something I've made myself. I worked on him a year; then he did something that showed me he was a completed job and fit to be trusted.

"It was on the drive in the Spring up at Brulé Rapids. The Chinese cook—Wah Song—was spearing fish ahead of the drive and fell in—at the head of the rapids, right in the white water. There was no chance to get to him, and the first logs were just reaching for his head when Bart picked up Wah's spear. Twenty-foot handle on it, and six long tines.

"Wah was a good cook, so Bart drove the spear through Wah's right arm and snaked him out of the white water across the butts of the first logs. Wah had to have his right arm taken off where the tines went through, of course, but—he was left-handed and Bart knew it, and knew that I'd had trouble getting good cooks! That's how I pick men to trust, Mud."

He chuckled, then a frown swept over his brows.

"Wah Song quit cooking after that, though he didn't have to on account of his arm. I'd have kept him on. But he'd been saving money, it seems, and he went up the river to Whisky Falls and started a joint, and got a gang of hard cases around him until now they've got a regular little hell-hole up there.

"I don't like it. Too many of my men get drugged, stabbed and crippled and killed. Some time I'm going to stroll up there and give that hell-hole a baptism of fire. Yes sir; I'm going to burn it clean to the ground and wipe 'em off the face of God's earth. If they don't get me first, that is. They're threatening right along to take a shot at me," he laughed.

"Well, that's the way I pick men to trust, Mud. That's my system. Bart can get out more logs per man than I can—now."

His eyes turned to the copper head-band which was gleaming dully in the light of the fire.

"But,——him, good man as he is he can't come bringing Belle Peabody presents just yet. Well, come on, Mud; you've got to be ready to start in an hour, so we'll have a quick, early supper."

He led the way back to a spacious dining-room which, through a row of French windows, looked out upon the park-like grove of pines. The top branches of the giant trees were still golden with the light of the sun, but on the earth night already had fallen. To John's further amazement Belle, coming in, switched on electric lights which filled the room with a subdued glow. Belle's eyes promptly went to John's feet.

"Why—Mr. Mud!" she cried. "Haven't you changed yet?"

"I haven't had a chance," protested John. "Don't worry, I'll have a chance pretty soon."

"Very soon," corrected Wolf John with a quizzical smile. "Mr. Mud is going to start for Main Camp on the tote-team in less than an hour, and he'll have his chance to change into a man's clothes before he goes. Belle, my girl, you are not to accept any presents from anybody but me."

"All right, Uncle John," laughed the girl. The understanding between these two was complete. "But Uncle John! Wasn't it a lovely specimen of ancient Indian work?"

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"It was. So lovely that I kept it—for my own collection. Smoke up, Mud. Tuck in your meal as fast as you can. You'll have to have your outfit and be ready to start when the team's ready."

John was too nearly famished to need any further urging. During the meal not a word was spoken of his uncle's invitation to him. He learned that Belle had come home from boarding-school but a few weeks before, that Bart had managed to have many excuses for coming down to the settlement since she had arrived, and that there was only one living person to whom his uncle was anything but "Wolf John," and that was the tall, lithe girl across the table. Also, that the outlawed gang that had gathered around the one-armed Wah Song at Whisky Falls was beginning to dispute the old king's assumed right to run that part of the country.

"And that means war!" growled the old man smiting the table. "And by the Lord Harry I'll give 'em war till there isn't one of them left in the country."

"Won't the authorities take care of them?" suggested John.

The old man growled a hearty laugh and smote his barrel of a chest.

"That's me!" he chortled. "I'm all the authority there is up in this neck of the bush. And those high-bankers up at Whisky Falls will have this authority taking care of them before they're much older.

"Time's up, Mud," he snapped, looking suddenly at the great clock which ticked slowly in one end of the room. "Get down to the wannigan—to the store—and get into your outfit. Bart'll show you. You're coming back here for Christmas dinner, Mud. That's about three weeks—if you stick that long. By that time I'll know if there's any iron in that big hulking frame of yours. If there is, Bull Bart will bring it out and see if it's easy stuff to break. Now, get away!"

John obeyed promptly. The old man's imperiousness dominated him, and though his feelings were tinged with anger and resentment, he did not hesitate.

"Good luck, Mr. Mud!" said Belle, holding out her hand. "I hope you'll learn to like our grim and forbidding woods."

"Thank you, Miss Peabody," stammered John. "Thank you—again—for showing me the way."

Wolf John looked at the pair of them.

"Hm, hm. That's so," he muttered. "I gave orders for you to get out here without anybody's help—if you could—but I forgot little Belle. She showed you the way. Now you get down to the wannigan and Bart'll show you another."

DOWN in the store John found Bart waiting for him. By this time Nature had begun to send in her due-bills for the strain he had put on his body in the cruel day's march, and his muscles were stiffening. The heat of the house, and the meal he had eaten, had lulled his senses, and the magic of sleep was clamoring at his eyes, his brain, his legs, for opportunity to begin its work of recuperation.

Bart snapped orders at him and he obeyed like an automaton. He sleepily signed a receipt for an armful of clothing and sleepily began to change. As he did so Bart picked up the receipt, glanced at the signature, then looked at John between narrowed lids. John, in his sleepiness, had at first forgotten his rechristening, and had signed "John Peabody," erasing the Peabody and changing it to "Mud" when he remembered.

He was quite unconscious of Bart's scrutiny. He was conscious, however, of the delight of heavy arctic socks on his numbed toes, and of the ease and comfort of lumberman's rubbers that took the place of his warped shoes. A phenomenally heavy woolen cap, a thick blue woolen shirt, red and blue checked mackinaw, and a pair of heavy mittens, and John stood up arrayed like any lumber-jack about Peabody Point.

"All right."

Bart was waiting for him as John stumbled heavily forth from the store. A huge sleigh, bearing tons of sacks, boxes and barrels of provisions, came slipping over the snow, the trace chains of the four horses drawing it clanking musically.

"Pile yourself up in the box there some place, Mud."

Bart seemed to spring directly from where he stood before the store entrance on to the seat beside the little old man on the driver's seat.

"All right, Nels, let 'em go."

John vaulted painfully over the high side of the sleigh-box. Fortune was unkind to him and he landed on the sharp edge of a barrel. He cried out in pain and vexation.

Neither of the two figures on the seat in front paid the slightest attention. Sleep

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already was laying heavy fingers on his eyes. He crawled over the boxes and barrels until he found a row of flour sacks directly behind the seat. It was a soft spot and sheltered from the wind.

John curled up on the sacks to think things over—the trace-chains were jingling musically, the sleigh-runners whined when they struck a piece of ice. What a wonderful sort of girl that was! The jingle of the chains was soothing music. The whish of the runners almost hypnotic. The next that John knew a heavy hand was jerking him from the sleigh and Bart's icy voice was saying:

"Wake up! What's the matter; want to sleep out all night? Come on; shake a leg. Follow me, I'll show you where you can bunk."

Less than half awake John rolled from the sleigh and followed Bart, or rather the lantern in Bart's hand. He was conscious that they were in the woods. There was no mistaking it. The cloud-reaching pines stood like walls all about the tiny clearing in which they had stopped.

The darkness was as no darkness that John ever had seen, and a slight wind was filling the night with the mournful sough of shivering pines. He saw a rude wall of logs revealed by the dancing lantern-light, then a door.

Bart flung the door open and strode in. It was a long, low room with a double row of bunks along the walls. An odor of stale tobacco smoke and drying clothes struck John's nostrils. Silence reigned, shivered and shattered anon by variegated and unbelievable examples of snoring. He was in the bunk-room of a big logging-camp—Peabody's Main Camp—and the time was midnight.

"Here you are."

Bart slapped his hand on an empty lower bunk, swung around and went out, closing the door and leaving John standing in total darkness. But John was grateful. Here was a place to lie down and sleep. Sleep was what his big, exhausted body craved at that moment above all things in the world.

He fumbled his way to the bunk Bart had indicated and crawled in. Being tall, and unused to the architecture of camp bunks, he naturally bumped his head against the bunk above him. One second, perhaps, he rubbed the bumped spot. And then instantly came sleep—sleep in which he dreamed a dream of his uncle and Belle struggling with a host of one-armed Chinamen, while Bart, for some strange reason, looked on and smiled. And then——

"Ro-o-o-oll-ll out! Daylight in the swamp! Roll out, lumber-jacks, ro-o-o-oll-ll *out!*"

It was morning, and Dugan the red-haired cookee of Main Camp, lantern in hand, was standing in the doorway of the bunk-house, dodging boots and grinning at a flood of curses as he performed with impish glee his morning duty of arousing the men from bone-deep slumber to another day's hard work.

CHAPTER VI

"BREAKING IN"

JOHN lay in his bunk listening to the thud of feet on the floor as the men, grumbling and cursing, tumbled from their bunks, dressed hurriedly and slouched out into the chill morning air. He knew he must follow their example, but a few extra winks of sleep just then were precious. He fell soundly to sleep again and was rudely awakened by the jolt of his own body striking the bunk-house floor. Bart was standing over him with a lantern. There was no emotion in the man's face, though John sleepily realized that it was Bart's arm that had jerked him out upon the floor.

"Shake a leg, Mud," said Bart quietly. "You're due in the eat-house five minutes ago."

John tumbled sleepily after him out into the chill morning air. It was still dark, though in the east a sickly graying of the sky told where the day was rising.

"There's the chuck-house," snapped Bart, pointing to another long building, from the open door of which came the gleam of lights and the sounds of many men eating hurriedly. "Hop to it."

It was not John's notion of the way to begin the morning, but he dutifully entered the lamp-lighted cook-house and found himself a place at the single long table. There were perhaps eighty men seated in the room, and each and every one of them was so busily engaged in stowing away steak, potatoes, flapjacks and steaming tins of coffee that no attention was paid to the newcomer.

John's rested body now was crying for

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nourishment to repair the strain of the day before, and the food was of excellent quality and cleanly served. A hearty meal and great drafts of the strong, warm coffee thoroughly awakened him and he followed the other men out into the graying darkness with a brisk step and eagerness to discover what was awaiting him.

He did not have long to wait.

"Here you, Mud, this way," came Bart's voice sharply from in front of the tiny office tacked on to one end of the cook-shack. "You'll work with Shorty here."

That was all. Bart was off with the suddenness of a cat, and presently his voice was raised in curt orders down by the stables.

John looked in amazement at the shoulders of the man whom he had been so quickly turned over to. Never had he seen such shoulders. They were so wide as to approach deformity. The man was probably a little above middle height, but his enormous breadth of shoulder and a pair of phenomenally bowed legs caused him to appear to merit well the nickname of "Shorty."

Though the morning cold was sufficient to cause John to shiver in his tightly buttoned mackinaw, the man's blue shirt was open at the top, but a golden red beard covered his throat like a mat. John looked at the small blue eyes, merry and clean as those of a boy, that gleamed out of the hairy face and liked his working partner at once.

"My name is not Shorty," said the man slowly, puffing at a short black pipe and eying John shrewdly. He spoke with an accent that puzzled John. "My name is Norby. You can pick up that ax and mallet and those wedges and follow me."

Throwing a long cross-cut saw across his shoulder he led the way out of camp and into the woods. Though the camp clearing by this time was fairly light, in the thick woods, with the branches interlaced overhead, it was still dark, and when at the end of fifteen minutes of walking they reached the spot where they were to work Norby sat down on a stump, refilled his pipe and waited for daylight to appear.

"You're too long in the back for a sawyer, Mud," he said suddenly. "Why didn't you hire out for a job on the roll-ways? You got weight enough to be a good man with a peavy. But I'll kill you sawing in two hours."

"I suppose you will," said John, "seeing that I never had hold of one of those saws in my life."

Norby slowly took the pipe from his mouth. For a while he stared at John incredulously.

"What kind of monkey business is this?" he demanded. "You hire out for a sawyer, eh? And you never had hold of a cross-cut in your life?"

"No. Not quite. I didn't hire out for any particular kind of a job. Bart knows that I am green, that I've never worked in the woods before, and that I don't know the first thing about sawing, or anything else here."

Norby put his pipe back between his teeth and puffed thoughtfully.

"Bart must have it in for you, then?" he said at last.

"Why?"

"He knows that it takes a darned good, tough sawyer to stick with me. A green hand ain't got any chance. He knows you'll keel over and have to quit. Then the camp laughs at you. Have you had some words with him?"

"Absolutely not."

"Huh! That's funny. Well—" Norby looked around and saw that the dawn was driving the darkness out of the woods—"we'll see what we'll see. Bart pays me ten dollars a month more than any other sawyer in camp, so I can't lay down and give you a chance to stay with me, but we'll do the best we can."

He put away his pipe and picked up the double-bitted ax and approached a tall pine. Having decided which way the tree was to be felled he chopped a deep notch in the falling side so quickly that it was done before John realized that the day's work had begun. Next Norby picked up the cross-cut saw and moved around to the opposite side of the tree.

"Take hold," he said, placing the teeth against the trunk. "Kick your feet well down in the snow so you won't have to bend over so much. Don't squeeze the handle like that; let her ride easy in your hand. Now, remember you just got to pull it toward you—here! You don't need to push it back, I'll 'tend to that. Now, pull her toward you. Here! Don't hold her back. Pull! Let her come—now you're getting the hang of it. Don't bear on her; don't try to shove it through the tree—the

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teeth'll eat in fast enough. Pull! Easy on her. That's right."

In spite of John's clumsiness the long, razor-like teeth of the saw ate rapidly into the white pine, throwing the sawdust in clean, sweet-smelling spurts on either side. Presently the saw stuck.

"Wedge," said Norby pointing.

John handed him one of the wedges and with the mallet Norby drove it behind the saw, and the work was on again. Presently John felt that the tree above was swaying. He looked up and nearly had his arms pulled out of the sockets for his pains. Norby kept the saw going until the tree was beginning its slow, leaning fall toward the ground. Then he quickly unscrewed his handle from the saw.

"Pull her out," he commanded. "Get over; get over there back of that spruce, you fool!" he cried as John stood still. "Want the butt of her to punch a hole through you?"

As John sought the indicated shelter the big tree came down; a soft swish marking its course through the air and a cannon-like boom as it struck the ground. The butt jumped like a shot straight back twenty feet beyond the stump, and John instantly realized the importance of being safely to one side when a tree came down.

With his ax-handle as a measure Norby quickly notched the great trunk into proper log-lengths. The tree made four saw-logs, which meant that Norby and John ran the saw through it four times. John had thrown off his mackinaw, his shirt was open, and he was panting by the time the fourth cut was finished. And Norby, drawing out the saw, looked at him and said:

"Well, you're trying hard to learn, anyhow. You can't stick it out, though, that's the trouble."

John did not reply. He had his own doubts about his ability to stick it out; but also he had, while sweating over his first clumsy attempts as a sawyer, become obsessed by an ambition. And this ambition was to stick it out, no matter what the pain to him. For he realized that if he gave in he would have begun his stay in the woods as a failure. Bart would laugh at him; and for some strange reason the mere thought of this inspired John with a determination that he had never known before. Bart—Bull Bart—the man who had tried to present Belle Peabody with the Indian head-band, wanted to laugh at him; therefore he was not going to have the chance.

"I'll stick as long as I can, anyhow," said John quietly. "Where's our next victim?"

By the time the fifth tree had been felled and "logged up" John knew that Norby was right: he couldn't stick it out. Nature had been kind to him and given him bones, muscles and organs which placed him in a superior class physically. The life he had lived outdoors at every opportunity, camping, fishing, hunting, walking, swimming, as much as he could, had builded his body up to the toughness and proportions that Nature had intended for him. A clean life had helped further.

John, as he had followed Norby into the woods that morning, was probably as perfect a physique as ever tipped the scales around a hundred and eighty pounds—and three hours later he was feeling like a hundred and eighty pounds of physical wreck. He couldn't do it, that was all. His arms were going dead; his back felt as if it were brittle. Each time that he raised himself up after bending over the saw he straightened himself tenderly, afraid that something would break if he stood up too quickly.

Nerve, grit, sand, determination had nothing to do with a matter like this. He might grit his teeth and swear that he would stick it out if it killed him, but when his pull on the saw grew weaker and weaker with each stroke, when his arms refused to take on new life in spite of his grit, he knew that Bart had reasoned well if he intended to have the laugh on him by assigning him to work with Norby.

THEN suddenly a strange thing happened. The saw seemed to begin to run more easily, without the least diminishing its swift, hissing course through the logs. To John's amazement his end of the pull seemed to start of itself. He found that all that was required of him was to draw the saw on the last couple of feet of the pull toward him.

What had happened? Was his "second wind" coming back to him? He looked at Norby. Then he understood. Norby was doing a full three-quarters of the work by pushing the saw back when his own pull was completed.

"Say, Norby, what are you helping me for?" asked John as they paused for a moment before starting a fresh cut. "Don't you like Bart?"

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Norby grinned slowly.

"You'll learn," he said. "You will get the knack in a day or two. Then perhaps you'll be able to hold up your end all right."

"But why are you doing it?" persisted John. "If you weren't doing about all of the work, you know I couldn't stick, and Bart would have the laugh on me. What's the idea—don't you like Bart?"

Norby measured off another log.

"Bull Bart is the best man in these woods," he said as he set the saw in place. "Jim Brackett is the best of the top-loaders, Whitey Jack is our best white-water man, and I'm the best sawyer, but Bart, he can do all of these things better than we can, and lick the other man to boot. I don't think many men like Bart — except the women," he added, laughing. "He don't care to have any men like him. He just drives men; that's Bull Bart."

"But the women?" suggested John with a strange feeling in his breast.

Norby winked shrewdly, shaking his head.

"That's another thing that Bart's best man in the woods at," he said. "He just crooks his finger at any woman he wants, and they come. Bart could have married any girl within fifty miles, if he'd wanted to. He didn't want to, though.

"Bart's too foxy. He's after money, and he looks far ahead. He knows that Wolf John is getting old and that when he goes his money and timber land will all go to his daughter, Belle. Fine young woman. Bart is the only young man she sees who's a fit match for her. No, I don't think any man in camp likes Bull Bart. He has no business calling me Shorty. Take hold there—and do the best you can."

CHAPTER VII

THE KING PINES

JOHN was quite sure that no man ever looked more eagerly to the coming of Saturday night than did he during those first strange days in Main Camp. For Saturday night, which to many of the hardened men of the camp meant the opportunity to walk six miles up to Whisky Falls to indulge in the wildest celebration, to John meant the chance to tumble into bed, to drop his fatigue-shot frame upon his bunk, secure in the knowledge that he might sleep as long as his system craved without any red-haired demon like Dugan waking him before daylight with his raucous "Ro-o-ol-ll out!"

He was tired to a degree that he never had believed possible for the human body. The test which he had undergone at one end of Norby's saw had probed him to the marrow of his bones. As he followed Norby out of the woods that Saturday evening he honestly marveled that he was able to drag his racked body upright on his two numbed legs.

"He stuck," reported Norby to Bart as John dragged himself wearily into the cook-shack. "I pulled him till his belly's against his back-bone, but he stuck on his nerve. Give him to me for a regular partner, Bart?"

"I'll see," snapped Bart, studying John with a look that was anything but friendly. "I guess you must be failing, Shorty; he don't look as good as that to me."

John stumbled directly from the table to his bunk. The bunk-house was the scene of noise and confusion. Men were laughing and indulging in horseplay. Hoarse snatches of song rattled the windows, and here and there the shuff-shuff-shuffle of rubbers on the floor told of some lumberjack venting the energy which a hard day's toil seemed not to have diminished.

John neither heard nor saw. He tumbled on to his blankets with a firm conviction that never in this world was there to be obtained a pleasure comparable to the boon of dropping weary bones upon a bunk, and in five minutes he was sleeping as soundly as if the bunk-house were miles away from any disturbance or noise.

It was broad daylight when he awoke, and the sun was shining in through the open door. Peeping out of his bunk John saw that the men all were up and had been so for a long time. Some of the men were shaving, others were lying in their bunks reading, and two poker-games were running at the farther end of the room.

"Ho ho!" greeted a voice as John's sleepy head appeared outside his bunk. "There he is, boys! He ain't dead; he was just sleeping."

"What?" demanded a second voice, assuming surprise. "You mean to say any human being could sleep like that? Nevaire! He's dead—well by the great pike pole! If there he ain't setting up. Boys, oh, boys! Mud wasn't dead, he was just

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sleeping. Three cheers for Mud, champeen long-distance sleeper of the world!"

John grinned good-naturedly. He was feeling better. The long hours of perfect rest had wrought wonders. He felt for the moment the inexpressible physical contentment of the woods-worker, well fed and well slept out.

"Hip, hip, hooray!" he yawned, stretching himself luxuriously. "What time is it; about eight?"

"Eight! Oh, Mud! If you'd been hanging since eight you'd be pretty ripe by this time. It's just ten minutes past one, and if you expect to get any scoffing before supper you'd better hit the cook-shack right away. We're sorry but the cook ain't serving breakfast to us in bed any more. Maybe though, if he thought you was real tired——"

They chaffed him unmercifully as he rolled sleepily from his bunk. John joined in the laughter as heartly as any of them, for he had the fortunate instinct to see beneath the surface of these rough boy-giants and knew the hearty, loyal camaraderie which they kept hidden by roughness and horseplay.

"What's the use of getting up at all, Mud? Why not sleep right through till Monday morning? Say, Mud, if you're ever busted all you got to do is to go to bed and sleep till something turns up. Bart ought to let him have two days off every week to get slept out in. Let's get up a sleeping contest. Fatty the cook's pretty good; let's match Mud against him for a side-bet. Fatty? Huh! What are you talking about? The best Fatty ever did was thirty-six hours at a stretch, and that was after a three-day spree. I'll bet if Mud had money on him he could go a week straight and never turn a hair."

"I'll bet you I can, too," laughed John, "if you'll give me a week's sawing with Norby to train on."

A brisk wash in a bucket of ice-cold water and he was fully awake, his blood tingling and his senses beginning to appreciate the perfection of the mild Winter day. Overhead the sky was blue and clear; underfoot the snow was soft to the touch; on the eastern side of the camp buildings water was dripping lazily from the eaves; and over the whole scene, undisturbed by sound of ax or crashing tree, lay a Sunday silence and peace incomparable.

AS JOHN stood silent, held by the spell of the silent woods, the raucous voice of Dugan the cookee came from the cook-shack door.

"Say, you, Mud; if you want any dinner you'd better come humping. We don't serve no extra meals for late sleepers, you know."

John hurried toward the cook-shack in response. As he passed by the little camp-office tacked on to one end of the cook-shack, he looked inside and saw his Uncle John and Bart engaged in scanning papers which the frail, unhealthy looking camp-clerk laid before them.

"Better hurry up and throw the chuck into you, Mud," warned Dugan, setting forth a meal. "If old Wolf John sees you eating at this time of day he may ask questions."

John ate, hurriedly and thankfully. After finishing his meal, he came out of the cook-shack and saw his Uncle John and Bart standing near the stables while old Nels, the little teamster who had driven John and Bart from Peabody Point, was hitching a team of drivers to a light, double-seated sleigh.

His uncle's sharp eyes had seen him the instant he came through the door, and suddenly he found himself the object of the old man's closest scrutiny. Had John but known it, he presented a totally different picture from that when he first entered the office down at Peabody Point. He wore "stagged" trousers—trousers cut off between the knee and ankle—a hickory shirt, thick arctic socks, heavy rubbers, and a slouchy cap. There was a five-days' growth of his heavy black beard on his face, and his big chest and shoulders filled his shirt so thoroughly that the buttons were open at the throat for comfort.

"Come here—Mud," said the old man suddenly.

John came obediently, and for another space and at shorter range those keen old eyes studied him speculatively, as if appraising him inside and out, and striving to weigh and analyze the stuff he was made of.

"How d'you like it so far, Mud?" shot out Wolf John.

John looked back at the fierce eyes without faltering.

"All right," he said.

A tiny smile flickered in one corner of his uncle's mouth.

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"Bart tells me you've been pulling saw with Norby," he said quizzically. "Did he —umm—teach you anything about—umm —logging?"

"Yes, sir," said John.

"And you—umm—still think it's better than office work in the city?"

"Yes, sir."

"Shorty's failing," put in Bart. "I guess he must be getting old."

Wolf John turned upon his foreman with a questioning look.

"Didn't he hold up to his mark while Mud was with him?"

"Oh, they made logs enough," said Bart. "But they must have had easy timber to do it, because no clumsy greenhorn with white, soft hands like Mud here could hold a cross-cut with Shorty if he was at his best."

"Let's see your hands, Mud," snapped Wolf John sharply. The trace of a smile again appeared on his face as he beheld the raw spots and callouses on John's palms and fingers. "Your hands wouldn't get mussed up like that doing office work, Mud," he suggested. "And that's just a starter to what the woods will do to you."

"Yes, so I've been told," said John dryly.

"And you still think you want to try to stick here?"

"Yes sir."

The little teamster came driving up with the sleigh. Bart and Wolf John stepped into the rear seat.

"Get in, Mud," commanded the old man.

As John clambered obediently in beside the driver, Bart turned upon his employer a look which asked plainly, "Why's he coming with us?" And the look which Wolf John returned him said, "None of your business" so plainly that Bart turned his head away, angered and puzzled.

To John's surprise, Nels turned the horses' heads away from the tote-road and drove slowly out upon the little, brushed-out road which ran straight northward from camp. The logging roads were to the south and east of camp, and, though he had never been in this direction, John was under the impression that to the north of the camp lay nothing but a wilderness with foot-trails. As he stepped into the sleigh he had bumped against a big rifle nestling close to Nels' side, but as Nels, who was the camp meat-hunter when not acting as tote-teamster, seldom went anywhere without his rifle there was nothing remarkable in that.

John did not waste much time puzzling over where they were going or why. The blue sky and sun above his head; the carpet of snow all over the world; the whipping, tingling Winter air in his blood and lungs; and overhead the gentle, lazy whisper of the pines as they swayed in gentle, lazy breeze. Miles away a hound gave tongue; a whisky-jack, flying across the road, shrieked shrilly; red-squirrels scolded volubly as the sleigh went by; and up above, sole occupant of the Winter heavens, circled a huge hawk in the eye of the sun.

An exclamation of delight broke from John's lips. Old Nels looked at him curiously.

"You like it?" he asked.

"You bet. Don't you?"

"I'd rather be here than have a million dollars," said the old man. "Giddap!"

TWO miles or so from camp the little road ended abruptly at the edge of a frozen marsh. For three or four miles the level white expanse stretched before them, broken here and there by an island of alders or willows. So clear was the air that John could make out on the farther side of the marsh what appeared to be a solid, bluish wall.

"What's that?" he asked of Nels, as the sleigh slipped out upon the marsh.

"That's where we're going," was the reply. "That's the King Pines."

Half an hour of steady driving over the untracked swamp and the bluish wall had become distinguishable as a mass of trees. As the sleigh drew nearer and nearer, and the proportions of the trees became apparent, John gave vent to an exclamation of awe and surprise. He had thought some of the largest trees about Main Camp large in size, but the smallest tree of the forest before him was colossal in comparison.

Straight and clean the King Pines stood, each trunk bare for a hundred feet from the ground, without a trace of underbrush about them. Above, a hundred and fifty feet from the ground, their branches met and interlaced, forming a canopy which shut the sunlight out and created the bluish darkness which John had espied from a distance. So clean was the ground beneath from brush and smaller trees that Nels drove into the woods as easily as he had driven over the marsh.

"Fit stuff to fight for, Bart," said Wolf

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John, eying the forest giants about them with expert appreciation. "The logging-man who'd see this bunch and not try to get it wouldn't be worth his salt!"

Bart nodded.

"You'll be a hundred thousand dollars richer when we get this bunch back of the booms," he said.

"Just about," agreed Wolf John. "Whoa! Pull up, Nels; let's look around. Yes, here's the trees we blazed last Summer."

They alighted on a flat bit of high ground where half a dozen of the big trees were girdled with ax slashes.

"Yes, this is the place we picked for camp, Bart," said the old man, stamping energetically around. "It's the place; looks just as good now as it did last Summer. Put the bunk-house there; cook-shack here, stable over there. Run your main road straight east and west to the river, and cross it with two smaller roads—one here and one higher up, and there's your lay-out.

"Log the stuff that's farthest away while the roads are frozen hardest, and work down toward the river as the soft weather comes. Yes; we ought—hello; what's that, Mud? What's that board doing on that tree?"

He came rushing over to where John was reading the marking on a piece of board tacked firmly to the trunk of a tree.

MR. PEABODY:
Don't try to log these woods. Your lease is no good. You can not rob the poor Indians. They have powerful friends. You will be shot the day you drop the first pine in these woods.

THE TRIBE.

"The Tribe!" bellowed Wolf John mockingly. "Oh, the lying devils! The dirty, sneaking, cowardly combine! The high-banker, Trust robbers! Now they're working through the tribe. They tried to buy my lease first. Then they insisted I turn it over to them on a percentage basis. Then they threatened they'd shut the market to me. Then that the Government would interfere. And now when I've called every bluff they've made, and showed that even if they are the Trust they've got to have real cards to beat John Peabody, they work through those poor Chippewas and threaten my life!"

IN HIS fury he tore the board from the tree and broke it to pieces in his bare hands.

"Damn you, Jim Lowrey!" he cried, uttering the name of the multi-millionare head of the lumber trust.

He hurled the broken bits of board into the snow and stamped on them as if they represented his enemy.

"This is his work, this is his sneaking way. The same as when we were river-pigs, running the old Big Wolf, back in Wisconsin. He shot a man from behind a stump back there; and his damn trust has been shooting in the back every logger with guts enough to buck it ever since it was started. Threaten me! Scare me!"

He raged up and down between the pines, his cap off, his head of white hair tossing.

"The Tribe! And I've got the mark of every one of 'em on the contract, and took me ten years to do it. Bart!" he said quietly, suddenly stopping his pacing, "I'll bet a team they've tried to get next to you."

Bart laughed easily.

"I wouldn't tell you if they had," he said. "But if they had, and had made it look better to me than staying with you, I wouldn't be here, you can bet two teams on that."

Wolf John nodded.

"Good talk, Bart. No drivel or sentiment about loyalty or friendship. Just business; that's the talk. Ugh!" He clutched suddenly at his left side and leaned weakly against the tree, trembling and panting.

Bart looked away, and again it seemed to John that he smiled as he had done that first day in the Peabody home, a smile that seemed to tell of a secret and a power which he possessed and which Wolf John never dreamed of. The cruelty and ruthlessness that gleamed for a flash in the averted eyes told that this man would stop at nothing, not even murder, to achieve his ends.

"Just business," he said. "The same as your reason for paying me more than any man on your pay-roll."

"Right," snapped Wolf John, recovering himself. He swung suddenly on John. "Well, Mud, what do you think of the woods now? You see there are other things to the logging game besides pulling a saw."

"I think that sign was a fool bluff," said John, while Bart looked on, suspicious and vexed that old Peabody should pay so much

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attention to this greenhorn. "There's bluff written all over it."

Wolf John was serious as they climbed back into the sleigh.

"Bluff?" he repeated doubtfully. "I dunno. The sign was put up by some one of that gang up at Whisky Falls who's in the Trust's pay, and there's men up there who'd as soon put a bullet through a man as Nels here would through a buck. Well, shooting's fair enough, too, because there's always a chance that I'll get in the first shot instead of them."

"Or that old Betsy here'll get it," said Nels, patting his 45-90.

Wolf John laughed grimly.

"Or you might send Mud after 'em," said Bart quietly, "since he knows so much about bluffs and so on."

Wolf John looked at his foreman sharply. But Bull Bart was smiling easily, and apparently his remark had been made without any forethought or seriousness whatsoever. The old man opened his mouth to speak, but no words came. His face once more turned gray and again he clutched at his left side, as if in a spasm of pain.

"Indigestion, that's all," he muttered as the team stopped. "It's nothing, drive on."

John happened to glance back at Bart at that moment. The foreman was studying his employer's pain-gray face with something suspiciously like satisfaction in his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

WHY BART SMILED

THAT night John heard the explanation of the drive into the King Pines. Nels, the old tote-teamster, and Norby, both Norwegians, were cronies. In the evening after Bart had driven away on his regular Sunday night visit to Peabody Point, Norby, whom John had been trying to pump, led the way to Nels' little bunkroom in the stablemen's quarters.

"How about it, Nels?" questioned Norby. "Do we go into the King Pines when we're through here?"

Nels, who was plaiting a whip-lash, nodded curtly.

"Yes; there ain't any doubt of it now," he said. "They've gone so far as to try to scare Wolf John out, and you know what that means. Yes, we'll log that strip this Winter if there has to be more dead men up there than logs."

"What is the fight about, anyhow?" asked John. "Do they pretend that Mr. Peabody hasn't a right to that timber?"

"Well, it's kind of a mix-up," replied Nels, putting down the whip. "Wolf John's got a fair and square lease on the timber, all right, no doubt about that. It's on Indian land, you know, but the old man cruised it himself. They didn't anybody know what was up there till Wolf John went through it.

"He kept it secret, too, you bet. I knew, because he took me up there once, and I suppose Bart knew, because he knows all about the old man's affairs; but outside of that there wasn't anybody, so to speak, who knew the first thing about it. Indians don't count; they can't tell the difference between good solid stuff and a woods full of shaky butts.

"It was about ten years ago that the old man cruised it, and it was only this Summer that he finally got a lease, and his lease is only for one year at that. Well, in some way the Trust had got wind of what the King Pines was like, and Lowrey was crazy to get it, because of a beating Wolf John gave him when they were young men, years ago.

"So the Trust hurried up and offered the Chippewas' agents a lot of money, and the agents took the money and gave 'em a lease. And then they found that Wolf John had the Indians signed up through the gov'ment just a few days before! Well, the Trust wants to keep him from logging it this year, and those fellows, they never let a little thing like killing a man or two stop them when there's a chance to get a few million feet of timber."

"I wonder why Bart didn't go with Lowrey," put in Norby. "It was common talk that they offered him a percentage if he could keep Wolf John from logging the Pines this Winter. They say he was dickering with 'em last Summer, and then all of a sudden he broke it off. Wonder why he did that?"

Old Nels took out a black plug, carefully cut off a chew, put knife and tobacco back into his pocket, and looked at the floor.

"Belle Peabody came back from school," he said slowly. "The old man sent Bart down to Black Bear Lake to drive her up to the Point. Bart didn't do no more

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dickering with Lowrey and that crowd after that."

There was a long silence. John wished to ask a multitude of questions, but a sudden sensitiveness tied his tongue.

"Well," said Norby after a long silence, "he hasn't broke with Wah Song and that gang up at Whisky Falls, and they're Lowrey's people. There's women up there, and you know Bart."

Nels nodded and spat loudly.

"When Bart saved Wah Song's life that time in the Rapids, Wah Song he swore some kind of a Chinese oath that he'd do anything Bart wanted him to do—anything! Well, soon after that Wah Song had that place going up there at the Falls—right beyond the King Pines, and pretty soon after that they was Lowrey's people.

"I don't know anything for sure about it, but you can see what a help that gang and their whisky and women would be to cripple Wolf John's crews and keep him from getting that timber down this Winter—supposing if Bart had quit him and helped bother him. But—after she—Belle Peabody—came back from school, Bart didn't have any more time for that Lowrey bunch, as I've said. Of course he ain't broke with Wah Song. Bart doesn't burn any bridges even when he feels sure there's nothing but easy logging in front of him. Wah Song might come in handy, and then there's women up there, as you say, Norby."

Norby smoked reflectively, rocking to and fro.

"Whisky Falls will have to go before we start logging up there, Nels," he said. "They're too close. Bart knows too much about lumber-jacks to think he could keep a crew on the job with whisky and the rest of those things so near."

"They'll have to go," agreed Nels.

"They won't go just for any man telling 'em to."

"They won't go till they're shot out," said Nels, a sudden light flaring in his old eyes. "Unless Bart should have things fixed so safe for himself that he could afford to get along without Wah Song. Then he could tell Wah Song to get to hell out of the bush and take his gang with him—and Wah Song'd do it, too, for Bart."

There was another long silence, then John spoke for the first time.

"What do you mean by Bart having things fixed safe for himself?" he asked, trying to make his question appear casual. Norby and Nels looked at him together.

"That means if he was married to Belle Peabody, or going to marry her," explained Norby.

John, doing his best to appear utterly unconcerned, thought of how his Uncle John had refused to allow Bart to make Belle a present of the Indian head-band.

"How about Wolf John? What would he have to say to that?" he asked.

"Huh!" Old Nels shook his head, chuckling. "I don't think the old man would like it; but he thinks so much of that girl that if she wanted to marry Bart he wouldn't say a word—and he knows all about Bart at that."

"Yes," said Norby, "and Bart knows that, too. He's foxy and strong, Bull Bart is. He didn't turn down Lowrey until he knew he had easier and better logging in plain sight."

JOHN went to his bunk that night with a heavy heart. The more he heard of Bart the harder it became to hear his name spoken in connection with Belle's. He thought of her as he had seen her that first afternoon, glorious in her beauty, her tender strength, her magnificent young womanhood.

John had never been a ladies' man. Women to him had always belonged to the caged and befrilled part of the world from which he had so eagerly yearned to escape. But as he lay sleepless in his bunk that night with the memory of Belle's deep eyes before him, the thought of Bart was like the thought of something malignant and foul.

Were Norby and Nels right? It didn't seem possible! Yet John already knew them both for a breed of men who were painfully careful not to speak unless they knew what they were talking about. And without understanding why, he lay and tortured himself far into the night with the thought that Bart even then was in Peabody Point, the home of Belle.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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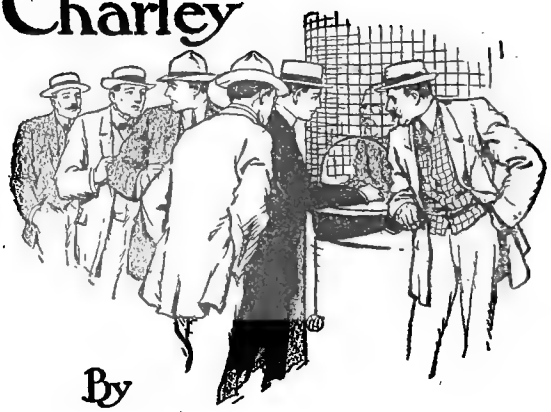
Come-On Charley Plays The Ponies



By

Thomas Addison

SCORE: $963,000.

"SAY, WAIT a minute, Come-On. Look here!"

Mr. Percival Teeters came to a sudden stop, like a lean pointer to the scent. He gazed at a dazzling array of Spring neckwear in a haberdasher's shop just south of Black's chop-house—and every Broadway *flaneur* knows where that is. A young man who, two corners below, had fallen in behind the pair also stopped; he edged up to them as they stood looking in at the show-window.

"The 'Soul Kiss Scarf.' Pretty scrumptious, hey?" Mr. Teeters commented.

"Kind of noisy," said Mr. Carter. "Scare the horses. Ought to have a cut-off."

The young man standing near laughed in open good-fellowship.

"Make a brass band sound like a lullaby," he remarked.

They turned and inspected him. He wore an Argentine frock, braided, with a double pink in the buttonhole, and a semi-conical silk hat that smote Mr. Teeters as the last extreme of elegance. A cast in one eye, the right, gave him a humorous expression which invited confidence.

"Swell, just the same," pronounced the secretary. "They'll know you are in town if you push one of those bibs in front of you. By gum, I'm going to get me one!"

He started into the shop, and Charley followed. So did the stranger.

"Those silk handkerchiefs stab me to the heart," he said with his easy laugh. "I'll tear off a dozen of 'em. Don't want to leave all my money to the old folks. They've got a plenty."

Now parenthetically let it be recorded that Mr. Teeter's impelling motive in acquiring for his wardrobe a "Soul Kiss Scarf" lay in the ravishing fact that he was to be of the party on the cruise of Mr. George Francis Grant's palatial steam yacht *Kelpie* in tropic seas. Miss Dorothy Grant had only that afternoon extended the invitation. One of her guests had failed her, owing to circumstances beyond his

Editorial Note—Samuel Drew, a New York lawyer with a $10,000 bequest for Charles Arthur Carter ("Come-On Charley"), a clerk in a small New Jersey town, yields to a whimsical impulse (and other things) and tells *Come-On* this money is only the advance payment on a $2,000,000 bequest to come to him if he makes the $10,000 grow. (Wants to see what a man can accomplish with just the *reputation* of having $2,000,000.) *Come-On* accepts the news placidly, moves to the Hotel Rirebien in New York, and becomes target for all the "con." men. Good-natured, easily approachable, yet somehow he always emerges winner instead of loser. Not such a fool as he seems, quick to learn from experience, doing very little talking, he adds a little each time to his original $10,000. *Percival Teeters*, his light-headed and slangy secretary, *Ball*, his newspaper friend, *Joe Link*, his boxing-instructor, and *Drew* the lawyer generally figure in his adventures.

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control, and she immediately telephoned Mr. Teeters. She delighted in him. He was a flowing spring of entertainment to the whimsical girl, and she regretted that she had not asked him first-hand. Now her opportunity was come she embraced it eagerly.

IT WAS a Tuesday early in May, and the *Kelpie* was to sail on the Friday morning tide at six o'clock. They would spend Thursday night on board. On Wednesday they were to lunch on the yacht. The "Restawhyle Seven," Dorothy called the party—her father, Mr Samuel Drew, Joe Link, Teddy Ball of the *Evening Scream* and, of course, Charley and Mr. Teeters. It was they who had put an unexpected kick in Mr. Simeon Huncks' "dead mule"—a little incident the reader may remember—and Dorothy wanted another laugh over it in the circle which could best appreciate the animal's marvelous resuscitation.

Mr. Teeters, since receiving his invitation, had floated in a whirl of excitement. There were to be girls on the cruise—daisies—and rich! He would cut a dash with 'em. He'd open their eyes a bit. He'd show 'em a line of he-duds they'd remember for a while. So he bought a "Soul Kiss" and, in emulation of the pleasing stranger in the Argentine frock, he laid in a supply of the flamboyant silk handkerchiefs which had cried attention from the window.

The young man helped him choose the colors. He was very friendly and frankly communicative. He had been in New York only a few days, he said, and did not know his way about very well. But he was learning. Out home everybody always spoke to everybody else, and that must be his apology for speaking to them. He hoped they would take it in good part.

"Sure," said Charley. "Glad to meet you. My name is Carter." He held out his hand.

"Crisp, Clarence Crisp, is my name," made known the other.

He shook Charley's hand, and reached for Mr. Teeters' inquiringly.

"I answer to Percival Teeters when they blow the dinner-horn," said that gentleman facetiously.

"No! You don't say?" exclaimed Mr. Crisp. He drew back a step and glanced his admiration. "You are not the Percival Teeters I've read about? This is not the Mr. Carter who took the hide off Wall Street last November? Not the Mr. Carter who——"

"That's him," Mr. Teeters interrupted. "And," he added, "it's me you read about. We are them."

Mr. Crisp fairly effervesced with pleasure. His squint eye did tricks that made him more humorously attractive than ever.

"Well, this is what I call luck!" he declared. "The papers back home have been full of you two—columns! I had it in my mind to hunt you up, if I could. Just wanted a look at you. Say—" they were out of the shop now— "come on in to Black's and have a drink. Wine. I made a killing yesterday and I'm wadded to the neck with that U. S. yellow stuff."

"Late. Got to get home to dinner," demurred Charley.

But Mr. Teeters' curiosity was evoked.

"Killing, what kind of a killing?" he desired to know.

"Races. Down at Louisville," Mr. Crisp explained. "A chap I met gave me a tip on Pluto. Odds against him three to one—and he ran away from the bunch! Left 'em playing tag with their tails in the stretch. There was nothing to it but count the money. Say, come on in and spill a quart with me, just for luck. I cleaned up six thousand on that little bay colt and I've got to celebrate."

"Merry Moses!" cried Mr. Teeters. And then, as Charley still hung back, "What's eating you, Come-On? Take a cigar if you don't want a drink."

"A box," offered Mr. Crisp prodigally. "Anything you name."

"All right. Try a smoke," said Charley, yielding to the pressure.

THEY went in, and as they cast about for a table Mr. Crisp gave an exclamation of joyful surprise.

"I'm a Dutchman if there ain't old Ben Goggins! O-oo! See what he's doing. He must have hit 'em heavy today."

He pointed to a thick-set, red-faced man, with graying hair, at the farther end of the room. This person was alone. A cigar was stuck at an acute angle in one side of his mouth, and he was running through, with moistened finger, a stack of bank-notes which, if Mr. Teeters was any judge, stood a foot high on the table before him. Charley viewed the sight with interest.

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"Who is Goggins?" he asked of Mr. Crisp.

"Betting commissioner for Delmont, Vanbilt and that crowd of goldbugs. Taps the poolrooms for 'em. A motorbus came near running over him yesterday. I was passing and pulled him back just in time. Had a drink together, and he gave me Pluto—the tip. Said I'd saved his life. Never saw a man so grateful. But come on over and I'll introduce you. Maybe he'll tell us something."

Mr. Goggins looked up from his task as they approached. He appeared pleased.

"Why hello, Clarence!" he saluted his guardian-angel of the day before. "What's doing?"

"Watering the ponies," replied Mr. Crisp, rolling his swivel eye at his companions. "Have a bucket?"

"Don't mind," assented Mr. Goggins. "Sit down. Wait a minute till I finish this."

He put his finger to his tongue and went on flipping over the bills, mumbling to himself the count—

"Hundred and five— ten— twenty— thirty— thirty-five— forty-five— fifty— sixty—sixty-five—seventy——"

He paused, frowning. He had come to the bottom of the stack. Mr. Teeters' eyes bulged from his head. The man was counting in thousands! Those were five and ten thousand bills under his hand!

"Confound you, Crisp!" complained Mr. Goggins. "You made me miss a shot. Ought to be a hundred and seventy-five thousand, and I only make it a hundred and seventy. Well—never mind. I'll go over it again with Delmont. It's his."

He reached under his coat and pulled around to the front a leather bag. It hung from his shoulder by a strap. He stowed the notes away in the bag and slewed it back into place. Then he looked at Mr. Crisp who introduced his friends, mentioning pridefully their wide repute.

"You don't have to tell me about these boys," spoke up Mr. Goggins with gruff heartiness. "Never met 'em before, but, Lord, I've heard enough about 'em! The old con game ain't what it useter was before they came to town."

He chuckled and wagged his head at the two sad young dogs across the table. Charley rather liked his bluff way.

"Easy going now for the Hi-Henries," observed Mr. Teeters jocularly.

"Yes sir-ee! You can't step out no more and sell the moon for a slice o' pie to the brother from Gazinksville," responded Mr Goggins with another chuckle.

Mr. Crisp, who had been busy with the waiter, turned to the commissioner.

"Ben, I drew down six M's on Pluto yesterday. Your tip was twenty-four carats fine."

Mr. Goggins shrugged.

"Sam Regan was up, and I knew what was going to happen, sonny. I get the dope straight from the works. Glad you made a little change."

Mr. Crisp squinted comically at Charley.

"Thinks I'm a piker. He bets 'em fifty thousand at a whack. Say, Ben, got anything for tomorrow? I couldn't get around today. Business."

MR. GOGGINS examined his cigar, found it had gone out, and relighted it with care. Then he remarked:

"There's one or two good things. What d'ye want to do, Clarence, let these boys in on the velvet?"

"Why, I wasn't thinking of that," returned Mr. Crisp. "Wanted it for myself. But if they'd like to grab off a few thousands——"

He looked at Charley, who shook his head.

"No time. Busy. Going away Friday."

"Oh! You're going away!" Mr. Crisp's tone expressed disappointment.

He drank the glass of champagne at his hand, and filled it again thoughtfully. Mr. Goggins laughed in his gruff, wholehearted way.

"Friday's a long way off, young feller. You could build a house between now and then. And furnish it."

"Gollamighty, Come-On, you don't have to ride the horse yourself!" burst out Mr. Teeters, who was warming with his wine. "All you got to do is place your bet and take the money."

"Look at me!" exclaimed Mr. Crisp. "Ben here gives me a tip yesterday. I drop around to the poolroom in Forty-fifth Street, hand two thousand to the book, wait thirty minutes—Pluto was in the first—and walk out with six thousand yellow boys buttoned in my jeans. Time? You can do it between drinks!"

"Don't know anything about horse-racing," said Charley stubbornly.

"Neither do I," Mr. Crisp assured him.

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"You don't have to. But Ben knows. If he'd tip us off, it's good as money in the bank. How about it, Ben?"

"Let him alone, Clarence," reproved Mr. Goggins. "Mebbe he's got scruples against it, and I for one respect a man's scruples, if they ain't no bigger than bumps on the jelly."

"Oh, of course!" agreed Mr. Crisp quickly.

"But," continued Mr. Goggins, "if you want a little play yourself, Clarence, come around to the shop before the ponies start. I shouldn't be surprised if I could put you on to a ten-to-one shot. I'll know for sure in the morning."

He emptied his glass, stretched himself and got up. Mr. Crisp sought to detain him.

"You ain't leaving? I wanted to ask you about the Derby. That," he informed the others, "is the big noise at Churchill Downs this week. Thursday. Sit down, Ben. The bottle's going begging."

Mr. Goggins declined the invitation firmly.

"Can't. Got to see Gus Delmont at seven, and it's six-thirty now. Got to turn this boodle over to him. He's a hundred and fifty thousand to the good on the day's work. Pleased to have met you, gents. So long."

He nodded pleasantly and walked away. Mr. Teeters finished his second glass, and with it spoke his mind.

"I ain't breaking out with kale so as I got to call a doctor," he avowed, "but I got a hundred I could stand to see something happy happen to."

Mr. Crisp cast his humorous eye upon him.

"Why not?" he quizzed. "Carfare comes in handy in this town. I'm going to play Ben Goggins' tip tomorrow. If you want me to I'll put you on with mine."

Mr. Teeters hesitated. This elegantly attired stranger was, after all, but a stranger, and a hundred dollars was two weeks' salary. He looked askance at Charley, but received no encouragement. Mr. Carter merely consulted his watch and went on smoking. Mr. Teeters slowly slipped his hand into his inside vest-pocket; and right there his doubts took wing. Mr. Crisp waved him down.

"Never mind the money, old scout. Hold up your finger, that's good enough for me. We'll settle after the race. It's the Rirebien you're staying at, isn't it? That's where they had you in the papers."

"Yes," Mr. Teeters told him, much relieved.

"Good! I'll run in tomorrow evening after dinner. Fill your glass and we'll drink to luck. Won't you join us, Mr. Carter? Just one before you go?"

"No," Charley answered, but with a grin. "Not that stuff. Too expensive. Cost me a hundred thousand dollars once. One bottle."

II

THE *Kelpie* lay off the foot of West Eighty-sixth Street in the Columbia Yacht Club basin. She was a bark-rigged, twin-screw ocean-going cruiser, two hundred and eighty feet over all with a thirty-seven-foot beam. If there was anything she lacked in the way of luxurious equipment—from a photo dark-room to an ice-machine—it was yet to be invented. Only a prince or plutocrat could keep such a craft in commission.

It was after the "Restawhyle" luncheon on Wednesday. Dorothy and her guests sat around under the awning aft, drinking their coffee. The party, however, was not complete. Mr. Samuel Drew was the missing member. He had sent Dorothy a telegram at the last moment, and it read rather curiously, to wit:

> Dreadfully sorry. Sudden illness confines me to bed. *Bon voyage.*

This, we repeat, read rather curiously in view of the fact that the lawyer was seen in apparent robust health by Mr. Teddy Ball—himself unseen—at twelve o'clock that day. He was stepping into Keenan's bar in Nassau Street as Mr. Ball was hurrying from the *Scream* office to the Fulton Street station of the subway.

Mr. Ball had called to him, but it did not carry, and he went on. Dorothy's invitation was for one o'clock, and he was of no mind to be late. Again, Mr. Drew's message was filed at eleven forty-five, which added to its oddity; for, it would seem, the gentleman was not stricken until some time after he had sent the telegram conveying the distressing news. Things like these cause comment, and they were reverting to it now on the *Kelpie*.

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"The man's dodging us," asseverated Mr. Link.

"But why?" asked Dorothy.

"He has something on his mind. I've noticed it lately," hinted the ex-champion darkly.

"Oh!" said Dorothy. "Perhaps it is business troubles."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Ball with great gravity, "it's love. The older they get the harder it hits. Makes 'em act up sometimes."

They laughed. Mr. Teeters who had been uncannily quiet, awed by his strange surroundings, opened his mouth at this juncture and, as many another man has done, put his foot in it.

"It's Come-On he's doing the bo-peep with. Drew's afraid he'll have to come across with the coin Charley's Uncle Billy left him. Two millions!"

"What?" whooped Teddy Ball. "Do you mean to say, Charley, you haven't got the money yet? Why the *Scream*—all the papers—printed it! How Drew found you—oh mother!" He could get no farther. Surprise smothered him.

"Huh!" growled Mr. Link. "So it's that!"

MR. TEETERS, aghast at what he had done, wiggled his mustache and eyed Charley apprehensively. When moved to wrath Mr. Carter did things with startling unexpectedness. He was not communicative about his affairs. The world had accepted him as a millionaire *de facto*, and he had let it go at that. Mr. Teeters, knowing his chief, had also kept a rein on his tongue in this regard; and now, unthinkingly, he had blurted out the secret. But happily Charley did not resent it; quite the contrary, in fact.

"Good boy, Skeeters," he applauded. "Kept it a whole year. Medal coming to you."

"I don't get the drift of all this," put in Mr. Grant, looking from one to the other of the two young men.

"Nor I!" exclaimed Dorothy. "And I despise mysteries. If it's a thing that can be told, tell it, Charley, or I'll send you home."

"Long story," Charley answered her. "Tiresome. Tell it, Percy. Your job. Secretary."

Thus commanded Mr. Teeters embarked upon the narrative, adorning it as he went along with felicitous terms of speech peculiarly his own. When he had finished, Dorothy, whose eyes dwelt on Charley in a way Mr. Ball found himself coveting, said softly—

"So from just ten thousand dollars you have made a million in a year?"

"Not yet. Nearly forty thousand shy," Charley corrected her.

"It isn't the money—you will make the rest." She waved it aside as a thing accomplished. "It—it's your cleverness."

"Faith, and it's true ye speak, little lady," boomed Mr. Link. "Those Blue Fleas, now——"

"Luck," Charley interrupted. "Came my way. Couldn't help it. And—" he wished to give due credit—"Drew was right. Reputation did it. All thought I had money. Tried to get it. I got theirs. Simple."

"That's all very well," said Mr. Grant. "But how about these two millions? Have you seen your uncle's will?"

"Yes. Didn't read it though. Trouble. Took Mr. Drew's word," he replied. "Had to make my starter grow."

"Then you really don't know whether the money is there or not?" questioned Dorothy, wrinkling her smooth brows.

"Have it out with Drew today," advised Mr. Link. "The man seems all right, but—he's a lawyer. God forbid I ever fall a-foul of one!"

"Let me interview him for you, Charley," prompted Teddy Ball. "I promise you I'll get the meat of the matter—or his goat."

There was an odd look in Charley's hazel eyes. Mr. Drew had noticed it there at times when the late Mr. William Halstead's millions were up for discussion. Mr. Grant, studying the boy, put a question to him.

"What do you honestly think of it, Charley? The 'starter' business doesn't ring just true, somehow. You don't think Drew—eh?"

Charley regarded him soberly.

"Straight as a string. Good fellow. Got to make my million first. Then——"

He reached over and took a perfecto from the box on the wicker table near him and lighted it in lieu of completing the sentence.

"Dad!" cried Dorothy excitedly. "How can he do it? There must be a way. Before we sail!"

"Lord love us!" ejaculated Mr. Link.

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"I wish I knew it. That's a thousand an hour."

Mr. Grant laughed.

"There may be a wizard's way, Dotty, but I don't know it. Wall Street is barred, faro is uncertain, and there is nothing else on now in other gentlemanly pursuits except highway robbery and plain till-tapping, both of which are somewhat hazardous."

"What's wrong with the races?" piped up Mr. Teeters. "I know a guy——"

He caught Charley's eye and subsided. Mr. Carter, for a reason he could not precisely define, was averse to publishing his acquaintance with Messrs. Crisp and Goggins.

"Oh, the Kentucky Derby!" said Mr. Grant. His face lighted up, for he loved a horse. "That is a real sporting chance. But unless you are on the ground to judge the form yourself it's a risky business plunging on a colt."

"The talent is playing Early Boy like the big drum in the band," Mr. Ball observed.

"Yes, he's the favorite," conceded the millionaire sportsman. "Personally I lean to Almo. I've followed that gray rather closely and I've an idea he'll be heard from tomorrow. However—" and he smiled at Dorothy— "I wouldn't advise Charley to go forty thousand on him. There are two sides to a race, remember."

"Like a fence," interjected Mr. Link. "The wrong and the right."

"Exactly. And the gate swings both ways."

MR. GRANT got up and strolled forward. Some stores were coming alongside and he wanted to have a look at them. There was a case of old red Chianti he was a little particular about.

Dorothy also arose. She glanced at Charley—a barely perceptible flash it was—and loitered over to the stern taffrail. He did not tarry a decent second; he followed her brazenly and they hung upon the rail talking. Mr. Ball winked at Joe Link.

"I should worry about that forty thousand if I was Charley," he chaffed.

"Um," grunted the man of muscle, and pulled stolidly at his cigar. Yet his heart was soft for Charley and the girl; for Mr. Link was Irish, and it was the Springtime.

"Say, Teet," continued the reporter, "you've got a part to dress on this trip. Betty Walters is going. She's so rich it hurts her. It's your cue, Merciful, my boy. A whole month to make a killing in! Of course you know the proper togs for a yacht cruise?"

"I guess!" returned Mr. Teeters confidently. "Got a trunkful."

"Any ducks?" queried Mr. Ball.

"Ducks?" echoed Mr. Teeters blankly.

"Look here!" Mr. Ball showed astonishment. "You're not telling me you haven't any ducks? White, you know, with green braid down the pants and on the sleeves, and cap sea-color."

"N-no," stammered the secretary. "I ain't got them. And Come-On ain't, either."

"What d'ye think of that, Joe?" appealed Mr. Ball despairingly. "He was going off without his ducks! And with Betty Walters on board—the biggest catch of the year!"

Mr. Link perceived there was something in the wind, but not knowing exactly what it was and being wholly unversed in nautical affairs, he simply turned loose a cloud of smoke and grunted.

"You wear the pants creased at the sides, Teet," went on the *Scream* man earnestly, "and a silver anchor between two stars on the coat. It's the hailing sign of yachtsmen in all the seven seas."

The stars and anchor were, of a truth, the insignia of a rear admiral in the navy; but Mr. Ball neglected to mention this. Mr. Teeters was disturbed as he thought how narrowly he had missed this important feature of his wardrobe.

"Where do you get this make-up, Teddy?" he demanded. "I didn't see any on Broadway."

Teddy smiled on him pityingly.

"Of course not. You get 'em at a regular yachtsman's outfitter. You hike along with me when we go downtown and I'll take you to a place. Friend of mine. He'll fix you up. Have the whole rig ready by tomorrow night."

"I'm hard to fit," said Mr. Teeters mistrustfully. He was consumed with fear that it could not be done in time.

"Pooh!" Mr. Ball blew the thought to the roving winds. "Leave that to Elwood. You can come aboard straight from his shop. And by Jove, say, I'll come with you! I'd like to see Charley's face when he finds you've put it over on him. Keep it dark, Teety."

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Mr. Teeters cackled. A pleasing picture of himself, dawning carelessly insouciant upon Miss Betty Walters and the assembled company in the brilliantly lighted saloon, arose before his mental view. He fondled his drooping auburn mustache and expressed his thanks handsomely to his friend in need.

"I got to chalk up one on your side, Teddy. You done me a good turn today."

"Don't mention it, old chap," said Mr. Ball, modestly declining to take merit to himself. "I only want to see you start right on this trip. There'll be some nifty dressers among the men, and you don't want to go around looking like a back number."

Mr. Link coughed—he glimpsed the situation now—but Mr. Ball refused to meet his eye. He couldn't trust himself.

While this was going on Dorothy was saying to Charley:

"Dad is funny. He has five thousand down on Almo—at his club. I heard him say so. But he doesn't want you to be guided by him. If you should lose——"

Charley nodded.

"Understand. Responsibility. I'd feel that way too. Wish I could get in, just the same."

"Charley! Would you?" Dorothy's eyes sparkled. She was her father's daughter, and—there is nothing original in the remark—women are born gamblers.

"Sure I would," said Charley, doubly sure because of Dorothy's delight.

"You would bet on Almo?"

"Any horse you say." He would have bet on a clothes-horse at her bidding.

"But how? There are no pool-rooms any more. It's against the law."

"That so?" frowned Charley. "Gee, I didn't know it. Never thought of racing till now."

"If dad——"

"He won't," grinned Charley. "But maybe I can find a way. I'll see. Ask a policeman. They know."

DOROTHY laughed, yet Charley was more than half in earnest. Since his Christmas princely check to the Police Pension Fund there was not a "flat-foot" on the force who did not remember him in his prayers—when he said them. Charley thought he could get a line on that Forty-fifth Street place. He knew there were card-rooms under police protection, why not pool-rooms?

"I'd give anything," bubbled Dorothy, "to hear what dad says if you make your forty thousand on the Derby."

"And Mr. Drew," amended Charley, his grin growing.

"Yes! Yes!" cried the girl. "If you could only corner him before we go—if you only could!"

Charley looked at her and turned serious. Her wind-blown, fine-spun hair of gold, her eyes dancing like amethystine shadows on rippling waters, her cheeks tinted with the rose-flush of the dawn, her lips—but why go on, especially when the going is so hard? A family-man, with the rent overdue and a testy grocer pounding on the door, can not coin metaphors *ad lib.* He has no liberty. And Charley's thoughts just then did not dwell on Dorothy's hair or eyes or cheeks—though they may have lingered on her lips; he was simply in love with her all over and he wanted to tell her about it. So he said:

"That million. Suppose I don't get it? Suppose I lose on Almo? Dorothy——"

There was a note in his voice which caused her to draw back a little—perhaps to get a better view of him, or, it might be, to screen him from curious eyes, for she stood directly in front of him. Girls have strange ways at times.

"Well?" She waited for him to go on.

Her calmness frightened him.

"Dorothy! I—you—Dorothy!"

He came to another pause and gripped the rail as if the boat were sinking under him.

"That is three times you've called my name, Mr. Carter, and with unnecessary stress," she informed him with asperity. "You seem—" she gave him a cruel look—"to like it."

"Dorothy!"

"Again?"

Charley gripped the rail with both hands. He tried to speak. The words he wanted would not come. He tried again, desperately, and choked out:

"Nine hundred thousand. Not much. But housekeeping. Rub along. Make more. Dorothy, I—I——"

"I don't believe it," jeered Dorothy, gloating over his confusion. "Lots of men have said it to me. Lots! It didn't strangle them either. It came out just as smooth

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as—as molasses. What you need is practise, Mr. Carter. Some darling girls are going with us. Perhaps—" she gave him a second look—"you may improve before we get home again."

With this she walked airily away, leaving Charley clinging limply to the rail.

III

CHARLEY had driven over to the Yacht Club with Mr. Teeters and with Mr. Link in his big French car. Only Mr. Link went back with him. Mr. Teeters and Mr. Ball sneaked off by themselves on the subway.

"Police Station, Billy. West Forty-seventh Street," Charley instructed his man.

Mr. Link eyed him curiously.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"Wait," was Charley's cryptic reply.

They ran down the Drive to Seventy-second Street and thence down Tenth Avenue to Forty-seventh. The lieutenant in charge received them with all the honors, and when they came away he went with them himself to the car.

"Leave it to us, Mr. Carter. You go right ahead," was his parting injunction.

"Maybe he won't come," said Charley.

"I'd hate to have a bet on that end of it," laughed the officer.

They drove east to the Hotel Rirebien, but as they were in the act of drawing up to the door of that gilded hostelry a sudden thought struck Charley and he bade Billy keep on to Lexington Avenue and run down it to Gramercy Park. Mr. Drew lived there.

"A-ha!" barked Mr. Link. "Going to see the sick man?"

"Yes. Got a card, Joe?"

"No. What for?"

"Let him know we called," returned Charley blandly.

It was after five when they reached the house. The maid who answered the door informed them that Mr. Drew was not in. Would they wait? He usually came home about this hour.

"No time. Give him this," Charley said to her.

He took a card from his case, wrote Mr. Link's name under his, and below it a line which read:

Glad you are not worse. Hope you will be able to sit up in the morning.

Leaving this for the maid to puzzle over they drove back to the Rirebien. Mr. Teeters had just come in. He was elated, but tried to conceal it. His yachting-suit was under way and would be a dandy.

"Ha!" he greeted Mr. Link. "Going to kill a plate of soup with us?"

"Want him to meet Crisp," Charley answered for the boxer. "May do something."

Mr. Teeters uttered a cry.

"Merry Moses! I forgot all about that guy. Maybe—gosh—maybe I'm out a hundred! Let's hurry up and eat while I got an appetite."

BUT Mr. Teeters was not out his hundred. They were smoking their after-dinner cigars in Charley's sitting-room, when Mr. Crisp was announced.

"Shoot him up!" Mr. Teeters bawled down word to the office over the telephone. Then he hopped about the room in an agony of suspense until the visitor appeared.

"Did we win?" he squealed. "Say now, you ain't come to tell me——"

"It's all right," Mr. Crisp assured him. "Five to one."

"Hey?" The glad tidings were difficult of belief. "I made five hundred?"

"That's what you did," stated the other cheerfully. "Here!" He held out a newspaper turned to the sporting page. "It's all there. Sunshine. Romped home."

"Five hundred, and I didn't put up a cent!" cackled Mr. Teeters. "Come-On, you stubbed your toe that time. I guess I'm not the little boy from Wiseville. Oh no, I guess not!"

"Gee, I was slow," said Charley ruefully. He introduced Mr. Link. "Mr. Crisp, Mr. Green. Friend. Good sport. Hunting for a tip."

Mr. Crisp who had been doubtfully, if covertly, surveying the ex-champion, extended a cordial hand. Mr. Link took care to clasp it lightly; he did not wish to give the gentleman a too vigorous impression of himself.

Mr. Teeters, who had listened agape to the introduction, suppressed an inopportune comment. Second thought came to his rescue; moreover, he did not like the look Charley directed at him. And, lastly, he forgot about it the next moment in the joy of his winnings.

"Play the ponies now and then, Mr. Green?" inquired the tipster pleasantly.

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"Not lately. Don't know much about the game, but I'm willing," proclaimed Mr. Link. He laughed good-naturedly.

"Think I'll take a shot," Charley said. "Derby. Anything doing?"

This was as Mr. Crisp would have it, what he had planned for and come for, in fact. But he smiled and raised a deprecating hand.

"Let me settle first with this little one from Wiseville."

He drew a fistful of bills from his trousers-pocket and shucked off five one-hundred-dollar notes from it. Mr. Teeters reached forth itching fingers for the money, but Charley interposed a question that delayed the transfer.

"Come out pretty well yourself?"

Mr. Crisp rolled his comedy eye at him and replied:

"Twenty-five thousand—that's all. In the safe at my hotel. I don't take any chances like Ben Goggins. Say fellows—" he returned his wad to his pocket and gesticulated with Mr. Teeters' sheaf of bills—"Ben has a card up his sleeve for tomorrow that I'm going to play wide open—my pile! He won't tell me till the race is called, but he'll have the dope right from the track. A cinch! The Big Ikes, you know."

"Does this go for me too?" queried Mr. Link anxiously.

"Why, as a friend of Mr. Carter—yes, sure," agreed Mr. Crisp. "But it don't go any further, understand? Just us four. If you talk it around, Ben'll shut up like a clam. We'll just drop around there tomorrow——"

"Where?" broke in Mr. Link, who was leaning forward breathlessly.

"I'll take you," said Mr. Crisp guardedly. "It's on Forty-fifth Street. Quiet, you know, but they've got the cops fixed. I'll come for you at two. They start then, but the big thing is in the third. We'll get there in plenty of time for that."

"How about Almo?" asked Charley. "Saw his picture. Looks good to me."

"Almo? Almo? Well, perhaps," admitted Mr. Crisp. "But you leave it to Ben. He knows. I've got thirty thousand that goes down on his say. What do you boys think of doing?" He added this casually, as you would ask a table-mate to pass the butter.

"Gee," said Charley. "Kind of risky. If I was sure——"

"Sure!" put in Mr. Crisp impetuously now. "It's a cinch, I tell you. Ben's on the inside, right next to the wall. You can't lose! Look at today. He gave me Sunshine, and——"

"What do you say, Joe? Fifty thousand? Twenty-five each?" Mr. Carter cut off Mr. Crisp's impassioned discourse abruptly.

"Suits me," assented Mr. Link. "Hope we'll get odds."

"Gollamighty!" exploded Mr. Teeters, who had never dreamed the middleweight was possessed of wealth to this degree. "Joe——"

"Take your money!" Mr. Carter bade him sharply. "Keep out of this. Not your class." He winked at Mr. Crisp. "Pikers barred."

"Why, say—let him in," entreated the roguish-eyed gentleman. "I'll put his five down with mine. Make it a thousand for him—perhaps more. You can't tell."

"Come-On," whined the secretary. "Let me in on it." He held out his hand to Mr. Crisp. "Gimme a hundred of that."

Mr. Crisp was nonplused; but he reluctantly handed over the note and awaited developments.

"Now," said Mr. Teeters exultantly. "I can't lose. Got my original stake. Go ahead and bet the rest."

Mr. Crisp cocked his eye at Mr. Carter and at Mr. Link.

"Well—I'll be—jiggered!" he remarked. And then he joined in the laugh Mr. Carter raised. He had to.

When he left, Charley insisted on going down with him. They would have a good-luck drink together in the bar. They had it, and Charley went as far as the door with him—even out into the street a step where he bade him good night and urged him not to be late on the morrow. He was loquacious even, an amazing mood for Mr. Carter.

Mr. Crisp went off feeling pleased with himself. A man lounging near the door, and another across the way, found business in the same direction. It was toward Fifty-fifth Street, West.

IV

MR. BEN GOGGINS waved his hand at Mr. Crisp and his friends and went on talking with a pale, parrot-nosed man over in the corner.

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Nobody else paid any attention to them. A look-out had let them in secretly at the front door, and another passed them into the pool-room.

It was on the parlor floor, two big apartments opening into each other. Gas flared from the chandeliers, for the windows were closed tight, shades drawn and inside blinds latched over them. Mr. Link grunted as he noted this.

"That's Bitney, Ben's spieling to," Mr. Crisp enlightened them. "Runs the place. We'll wait till Ben gets through. The second race is on."

Charley looked about him. Mr. Teeters twiddled his walking-stick and did the same. The sight was new to them. On a blackboard at one side the starters in the second event on the card were chalked up with the odds for and against first, second and third place. Opposite this board was the cashier, at a desk with a movable cage half encircling it.

Farther on, in the next room, a telegraph-instrument clicked, and the man was calling out the position of the horses as they ran—"In the stretch: White Cloud, Corinne, Jupiter, Belle B. closing up. Field bunched—" and so on. A dozen men were feverishly hanging on the telegrapher's announcements.

"Come on, you Corinne!" bellowed one.

"Eat 'em up, you Jupiter!" howled another.

"Oh, you White Cloud! Come home!" roared still another.

"Belle! Belle! What t'ell! Chase 'em, girl!" yelled a fourth.

They seemed to visualize that race eight hundred miles away and partake of its excitement. Mr. Teeters found himself imbued with it also.

"Jumping Jingoes!" he breathed hoarsely. "You get action for your coin here, Come-On."

"Lively," said Charley briefly.

Mr. Goggins came over to them. He was serious and preoccupied. Mr. Carter introduced Mr. Green. The red-faced man gave him a nod and a quick ocular measurement, and said to Mr. Crisp:

"No checks. Bitney got stung on one the other day, and he's through."

Mr. Crisp laughed comfortably.

"We are here with the real dust. Bitney can go bite his nose off. What's the lay-out, Ben, for the Derby?"

Mr. Goggins' reply was evasive.

"Early Boy is the favorite, two to one. They're quoting Kismet even, and the same with Dicky S."

"Rats!" scoffed Mr. Crisp. "You ain't saying nothing. "What's your bet, that's what we want to know?"

"Well," returned Mr. Goggins with deliberation, "I don't want to influence you boys none—it's Delmont's money I'm handling, not my own—but I got word to play Almo straight across the board."

"What?" Mr. Crisp's surprise was overwhelming. He staggered under it.

"By George!" exclaimed Charley, quite as much surprised.

"Saints in heaven!" muttered Mr. Link.

"But, Ben," argued Mr. Crisp, "Everybody says Early Boy—"

"Everybody!" snorted Mr. Goggins. "What does everybody know about horse-racing? You asked me a question and I answered it. Almo straight across—ten, seven and three."

Mr. Crisp gasped and rolled his squint eye ludicrously.

"Great guns, Charley! You had it all doped out last night, and here we've been waiting for it!"

"TELEGRAM for Mr. Goggins." The look-out at the door spoke. He thrust the yellow envelope through an inch-wide crack, and Mr. Goggins reached out and took it. They were standing by the entrance. The betting-commissioner read the dispatch with evident satisfaction.

"It's from the stable," he announced. "They're bidding Almo up. It's five, two and even now. Bitney's got it, of course. His wire is straight from the track. Better hop aboard, boys, if you're going to." He walked off unceremoniously.

"See that?" cried Mr. Crisp eagerly. "It's a sure thing. Almo! And you picked him, Charley. Let's go to it while we can. And say, I'm going to play that colt to win. Five to one is the tune. Come on!"

Mr. Bitney himself was in the cage when they crossed to it. They were still paying off on the second race. Everybody seemed to have won, or so it looked to Charley. When their chance came Mr. Crisp pushed in a stack of bills.

"Derby. Almo to win. Thirty thousand four hundred," he stated.

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Mr. Teeters wiggled his mustache in furious excitement. The odd four hundred was his. He stood to win two thousand. The ticket-writer scratched off a card and shoved it over to Mr. Crisp. Charley hesitated at the wicket.

"Well?" snapped Mr. Bitney. "Spit it out. They's others waiting."

"Take a check?" asked Charley.

"No! Ain't taking paper."

Mr. Crisp was astounded. He knew the ready money was in Charley's pocket.

"Didn't you hear what Ben said?" he whispered.

"All right," Charley apprised the pool-room manager. "Here's fifty thousand. Almo. Want to see it covered, though. Betting running high. May break you."

Mr. Bitney's parrot nose went up till his teeth showed.

"Oh! You're one of these wise ginks!" he sneered. "What's your moniker, little man?"

"Charley Carter."

"Write him a check, Aleck, and let him see it," commanded the boss.

"Ain't taking paper," remarked Charley affably.

They commenced crowding around him, the others in the room. Mr. Link placed his elbow in the stomach of one of them.

"Get back!" he growled.

The man gave a yelp and a curse in the same breath. Mr. Link's elbow had steam behind it.

"Here! Here!" cried out Ben Goggins, shoving his way to the front. "What's the matter here? These are friends of mine."

Mr. Bitney explained the situation.

"Well, cover his money," advised Mr. Goggins. "You don't have to put up the odds. The race ain't run yet. Cover it! Put it in the envelope with his own stuff and seal it. How does that suit you?" he asked Charley when it was done.

"Bully," Charley answered. "Much obliged."

MR. GOGGINS mumbled something and left him. Mr. Crisp followed. The telegraph-operator called the race, and the crowd hustled over to him. Charley peeped at his watch. It was half-past three. His mouth twitched at the corners in a secret smile, and he moved away from the cage. Mr. Teeters was at his heels.

Mr. Link remained at the cage. He was lighting a cigar and having trouble with it. It drew poorly. He threw it away and tried another but found he was out of matches. He asked Mr. Bitney for one and engaged him in conversation about the fourth race. He had a little change he wanted to place right. What was the book offering on Alice and Tommy Kent?

"They're off!" heralded the telegraph-operator.

Charley spoke to Mr. Teeters out of the side of his mouth.

"Something's doing. Get over to the door. Slow. Roundabout. Knock the man on the head if he opens it."

"Gollamighty, Come-On! What——"

"Go!" said Charley.

Mr. Teeters began to circle the room in a daze. When Mr. Carter used that tone there was but one thing to do—go!

The Kentucky Derby course is a mile and a quarter. The barrier is at the three-quarter pole. Passing the stand the first time the man at the key informed the room that Kismet led, Early Boy was second and Dicky S. third. On the backstretch he announced that Early Boy had forged ahead, Dicky S. was closing up on Kismet, and the field was bunched. Almo was not mentioned.

Charley looked around for Mr. Crisp. He was standing with Mr. Goggins on the outskirts of the crowd at the telegraph-board. They met his eye, and Mr. Crisp raised his hand in a signal of encouragement. A lot can happen in a race, and usually does, between the half and the finish.

"Three-quarter," chanted the operator. "Early Boy leads, Dicky S. pushing him, Dodo third."

Kismet, the second choice, was out of it. And Almo—he was not even in the running. Charley glanced at Mr. Link. The box-fighter was still talking to Mr. Bitney and the other man in the cage. Both appeared to be intensely annoyed by his persistency. Charley stepped quickly over to Mr. Crisp and Mr. Goggins. They stared at him; he was grinning pleasantly. Before they could speak the operator called out:

"Finish! Early Boy by a head. Dicky S. and Dodo."

CHARLEY clapped his hand to his mouth. There was a police-whistle in it, and he gave a blast that set the echoes ringing. At the same

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instant and with a lightning movement he swung at Mr. Goggins' jaw and landed like a sledge-hammer.

"My regards, Ben!" he shouted gleefully as that stout person staggered blindly against the wall. "Same to you, Clarence!" And he playfully put a hard fist in the latter's errant eye.

He sprang back. The crowd was on him like a pack of wolves. He had a momentary glimpse of Mr. Link jamming the cage over and down on Mr. Bitney and the ticket-writer.

He heard a voice at the door scream out something. "The bulls!" it said—just once—and then Mr. Teeters poked his stick in the open mouth. Then all went black before him. Somebody had tapped him behind the ear with a knuckle-duster though, fortunately, it was a glancing blow with a long reach.

When Charley came to he was propped up in a chair. Joe Link was massaging his head with skilled fingers, and Mr. Teeters was dancing about him wildly. The room was full of bluecoats. They had come down through the scuttle in the roof, having seen to the fastenings the night before. They had, in fact, been in hiding on the fourth floor of the empty house since early morning.

It was the old Gondorf gang the police had captured, thanks to Charley. The sharpers had staged the pool-room scene especially for his benefit. The "wire from the track" was but forty feet long. It began in a small room back of the parlors, and the man who pounded the key there didn't know the Morse alphabet from a runic rhyme. The other operator did the rest. He had imagination.

"By crackey, Come-On, I thought you'd cashed in!" croaked Mr. Teeters, as Charley opened his eyes.

Mr. Carter blinked and straightened up.

"Maybe I will," he said. "When they run the Derby."

He looked across the room at Mr. Goggins, Mr. Crisp and the others, ranged stiffly against the wall. He grinned as he scanned them.

"The Derby? It's over!" squeaked the secretary.

Charley took out his watch. It was a quarter of four. Considerable had taken place in fifteen minutes.

"Guess not," he answered. "Louisville an hour behind us. Central time. Two forty-five over there. Forgot that, Clarence—what?"

Mr. Crisp, for reply, rid himself of an oath that was choking him.

"Ha! Then I ain't lost yet!" chirruped Mr. Teeters, who was just arriving at the real crux of the affair.

Maloney, the lieutenant from the Forty-seventh Street Station, laughed.

"Joe Link there has the bank-roll. Maybe there'll be something coming to you when we hear from the race. Are you able to travel, Mr. Carter? The wagon's waiting for those birds, and we'll be getting on ourselves, if you can face the walk. Only three blocks."

Charley stood up. He was a little dizzy, but it was passing rapidly.

"Sure I'm able," he affirmed. "Fit as a fiddle."

V

IN THE fear of being charged with plain romancing we must nevertheless chronicle the facts. Almo won the Derby. No one expected him to do it, not even Mr. Grant with whom he was a favorite; but the knowing ones looked for him to show. The price against him in the future-books was seven to one, but he started at four to one owing to the backing. It being a matter of indifference to Mr. Goggins which horse won he had humorously fallen in with Charley's choice, as expressed to Mr. Crisp, and played the gray colt.

Now see what really happened at the track. Early Boy went suddenly lame as they were weighing him in, and was scratched at the last moment. Kismet stumbled and fell in the homestretch. Dicky S., who was right upon him, pressed hard by Almo, swerved wildly, unseating his rider, and the gray came under the wire in a canter. You have simply to turn to the files of the *Evening Scream* to verify this singular concatenation of curious casualties that May day on Churchill Downs, in the sovereign State of Kentucky.

Lamentable to relate, however, the Gondorf bank-roll summed up only sixty thousand dollars, and Mr. Carter's odds went glimmering. But he was content. He had risked his fifty thousand and had reaped a satisfying reward. Indeed, he refused the surplus ten thousand. He made Mr. Link

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take two, though the boxer fought it, and turned the balance into the Police Pension Fund. In turn the beatified police arranged to delay his appearance in court against the gang until he should return from his trip to Bermuda.

Out of his own pocket Charley paid Mr. Teeters on the spot—which was the station-house—the mythical bet he had won, and with the odds. It was a joke worth the money.

To Mr. Teeters it was a miracle. He had reached up, so to speak, and plucked seventeen hundred dollars out of the ambient air. He felt so good over it that he sought out Mr. Crisp in his cell and handed him back the "original stake"; and Mr. Crisp, by way of thanks, cursed him for the blink blinkitest furry fool in the forty-eight States and Territories.

Mr. Teeters, too astonished for reply, left the ingrate and, as it was growing late, slipped quietly off downtown to a rendezvous with Mr. Ball at the outfitter's. From this place he telephoned Charley to the Rirebien, saying he would meet him on the yacht.

CHARLEY and Miss Dorothy Grant were again in company at the taffrail of the *Kelpie*. The lights on Riverside Drive were twinkling at them, and the stars in their courses were winking at them—as stars have done at lovers' trysts since the world began. Charley had told his story to the others in the saloon, and Mr. Grant had laughed himself ill at it. They had stolen away now and were talking it over.

"Does your head hurt you?" Dorothy asked with delicious solicitude.

"Don't know I've got one," Charley answered. "Made of wood. Ax to split it."

"No such thing!" Dorothy was indignant. "It was frightfully clever, what you did. Clever—clever!" She iterated the words with supreme conviction.

"Luck," maintained Charley stoutly. "If I hadn't talked with Maloney——"

"That's just it," declared the girl. "You thought of that. Lots of people wouldn't have. Now if you could only see Mr. Drew!"

Charley grinned.

"Phoned him. Office. House. Club. No use. So I wired."

"Oh! That too was clever!" pronounced Dorothy who, it seemed, regarded the young man in the light of a prodigy. "What did you wire?"

Charley chuckled as he told her.

" 'Got my million.' All I said."

A boat that had put out from the Yacht Club was making fast to the gangway ladder. They went forward, for they were expecting Mr. Teeters. They were not disappointed. It was he. Mr. Ball was with him. As they came up over the side Mr. Ball sang out:

"Telegram for you, Charley. Met the boy at the landing. And say, Miss Grant, what do you think of Merciful here? Rather classy, I call him. He's got Charley faded to a lonesome landlubber."

Mr. Teeters, proudly conscious, threw back his light overcoat and revealed himself in the glare of the deck lamps. He saluted the girl—two fingers to his chin, as Mr. Ball had coached him. A curious smothered noise arose from the small boat below. The boatswain at the gangway deserted his post of a sudden. The engineer, who was loafing near, dove into his quarters hurriedly. Charley looked his secretary over solemnly. Dorothy gave a strangled gasp.

"Why, Mr. Teeters—you—you are perfectly stunning!" she murmured and reached for the rail to support herself.

"Ha!" piped Mr. Teeters, and wiggled his mustache triumphantly at Charley.

"Didn't I tell you, Skeeters!" exclaimed Mr. Ball. "Come along with me. Seventeen guns they ought to give you if they were on to their job on this barge. But maybe Mr. Grant will make it highballs. Take off your coat and come on."

He led the secretary aft. The sound of girlish voices, mingled with men's deeper tones, floated out from the saloon. Presently this was hushed. A deep silence reigned.

"I can't stand it!" babbled Dorothy. "It—it's too ridiculous! Too—too——"

She broke off and ran forward, up into the very bow. The watch drew back to the foremast. He was thoroughly yacht-broken. Dorothy leaned her head against an awning stanchion and cried with laughter. Charley joined in.

"It's Teddy Ball," he said when they had caught their breath.

"Of course! And he is showing off his handiwork." Then suddenly remembering—"The telegram! Perhaps——"

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CHARLEY, who had quite forgotten the message, tore it open. It was too dark to read it where they stood, so he struck a blazer. Dorothy peered over his shoulder; she guessed whom it was from. It ran:

That's all you have got. Letter to Hamilton, Bermuda. S. Drew.

"Oh, you poor boy!" condoled Dorothy. "It was a hoax after all."

Charley grinned widely.

"Guessed it all along. But I've got my million. Owe that much to him. Good old sport."

The pendulum of Miss Dorothy's coquetry which on Wednesday had swung to one extremity of its arc now swung clear over to the opposite extreme. Her hand fluttered up to Charley's shoulder and rested there, and she leaned forward—she was standing just behind him—till the golden web of her hair brushed his cheek.

The match had gone out, and it seemed darker to her than it really was. The trained sailorman by the foremast looked the other way; for he could see through murk and mist when need was.

"Charley!" whispered the girl. "Charley! You're a dear. There is not a mean bone in you; and—and if you turn your face just a little——"

It was force of habit, no doubt, for he was trembling and his heart was walloping his ribs, but——

"Sure," said Charley.

The Wild Geese

—An Article

By John Stagg

THERE were women weeping, many, many women, and children were asking vain, hopeless questions, and the gray Irish skies were streaming, that bleak November day in 1691. Above the patter of the rain, above the heavy tramp of marching feet, rose up the wail of those who stayed behind. Perhaps it would not be wholly fanciful to detect the voice of Ireland herself in that wild, shrill lament. For Ireland was giving up her bravest and her best.

The Wild Geese were taking wing. The very pick and flower of Ireland's manhood, the men who had fought at the Boyne and Limerick in a hopeless cause, the men who had scorned the terms of England, were taking ship from Cork to France.

The hopes and the cause of James Stuart, once King of England, had crumbled into dust. After the triumphant landing of William of Orange in England he had fled to France, and then, using Ireland as his base, he had attempted, with French and Irish aid, to recover his throne. But after William's victory at the Boyne, James had

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sickened of war and Ireland. He had sailed again for France, where luxury and a generous welcome from King Louis awaited him. His loyal Irish were more stubborn, but the fall of Limerick set a final seal upon William's triumph.

Offers not wanting in generosity were made to the Irish troops. They might have stayed in certain comfort with their wives and children in the land they loved. Instead they chose to follow into vague exile the Stuart King to whom they had pledged their faith; they chose to draw sword beneath the lilies of France in service of the land where that King had found a refuge and a home. After the fall of Limerick, out of the fourteen hundred men who had served in the King's Guard only seven accepted the English terms. The rest chose exile.

Already there were Irishmen fighting for France in the constant wars fomented by the greedy ambition of Louis the Fourteenth. In 1690 five thousand choice Irish troops had been sent over to replace the six thousand French soldiers dispatched by Louis to aid James in Ireland. So did the Irish Brigade have its beginning. And now, a year later, nineteen thousand more of the Wild Geese were taking wing from Cork. And few enough were ever to set foot again in Ireland.

Successive bloody wars were thinning the armies of France. After years of resistless domination Louis found himself with most of Europe allied against his insolent aggression. It will be believed that he gave an eager welcome to twenty-four thousand of such soldiers, men of tried courage, who needed only polish and discipline to make them the peers of any fighters in the world.

Once landed in France the Wild Geese were formed into regiments, under Irish officers, still speaking their loved Irish tongue, and were utilized with amazing promptness upon active service.

They were to be known as the Irish Brigade, whose fame will never die. They were to win unfading laurels for the land that bred them, the green wild land of ruined dreams. They were to write their names in blook-red letters across the map of Europe. In Spain, Russia, France, Germany, Austria and Italy they were to conquer against odds, to win from their very foes ungrudging honor for their reckless courage, and a name for dashing pluck which still endures. And in those far lands too often they were to find their graves.

All Europe has been watered with gallant Irish blood. Wherever you set foot, wherever battle or skirmish has been fought, the Irish sleep, in honored or in nameless graves. Often in their dreams were they to see the green, lonely, rain-swept hills of Ireland, often were their hearts to ache and sicken for the sight of her once more, but few indeed of those thousands who set sail from Cork were ever to return.

And of the officers who led them, who sacrificed estates and prospects in their loyalty to a futile King, one may select a few names at random—Fitzgerald, Power, O'Brien, Talbot, Lally and O'Donnell. You may still meet the descendants of those men in all the countries of the Old World and the New. They did great deeds upon strange soil, they won high fame, and, marrying if battle spared them, found new homes.

FOREMOST among those who sailed from Cork in 1691 was one striking figure around whose name, around whose tragic fate and story, romance will ever cling.

Perhaps no single Irishman has won more personal love than Patrick Sarsfield. Of gigantic stature, with a handsome, high-bred face, famous for a reckless courage that made him notable even among the reckless Irish, he was well equipped by fortune to become the darling of his soldiers. And in very truth they worshiped him, the ragged, fearless, ill-armed troopers whom he led in victory and defeat, but never with disgrace. Beyond all doubt he was a brilliant cavalry leader, one who with greater luck, in a brighter cause, might have risen to any heights. As it was, he won undying glory. As it was, there clings about him the glamour of knightly faith to a losing side, the glamour of noble failure.

One thinks of him as one thinks of Ashby and "Jeb" Stuart. Like them he won fame as as kilful cavalry general, possessed of brilliant dash. Like them he died too young.

In the teeth of odds, with half-disciplined, ill-equipped forces, he had yet won decisive successes for James in Ireland. His brilliant little battle outside Sligo enabled him to

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capture and hold the town for his luckless master. Later the dashing night march by which he cut off and secured one of King William's largest convoys of ammunition was of material service in making possible the heroic defense of Limerick.

And when Limerick fell at last, when valiant blood had flowed in rivers, when women and children had patiently starved in vain, when the hopeless struggle reached its bitter end, then brilliant prospects were dangled before the eyes of Patrick Sarsfield. William, who had ever a keen eye for a man, was eager to secure his allegiance. Sarsfield was offered high employment and advancement. At the worst, he might have lived in honor and peaceful comfort upon his Irish estates.

He chose, as was his way, the rougher path. He preferred to follow into exile the King who had fled from the Boyne, the King to whom he had pledged his faith. To such men as Patrick Sarsfield, to men of his sensitive honor, peaceful comfort has few attractions beside the call of loyalty. And so he sailed with his ragged, faithful thousands upon that Autumn day.

IF THE gods had been kind, a bright career had been open to his brilliant sword. Under Louis the Fourteenth, the great King of France, all things were possible to genius. Sarsfield might have ranked in history with Luxembourg, Condé and Turenne.

But it was not to be. His bright star was to find eclipse too early. His self-chosen exile was to endure for but two short years. After that, maybe his fearless spirit went winging back to the land he loved. But his body found a resting-place on foreign soil.

In 1692 he fought at Steinkirk, and had a brilliant share in the defeat of William the Third of England and his allies by the French. William was the foremost figure in the European coalition that was forming against King Louis. Next year again Sarsfield faced his old enemy at Landen, and again that enemy was defeated. At this battle the Royal Regiment of Foot of the Irish Brigade were the first to break William's line. William himself did nobly, covering the retreat of his shattered army with two devoted regiments of horse, and in person staving off the furious French pursuit.

In William's wasted, fragile body there flamed a spirit of heroic courage, and whatever his faults of generalship no other general has ever recovered so swiftly after crushing defeat. Sarsfield, after leading two fierce attacks upon the village of Neerwinden, fell desperately wounded. He was removed to Huy and there in a few days he succumbed to fever.

Perhaps as he lay dying, I like to fancy it, it was given to him to know that he would live forever in Irish hearts.

And there were others, so many others, who were lost to Ireland, who were squandered in a ruined cause.

Upon the Claremorris Road, in Connaught, the misty land of lonely lakes and green rolling hills, there stands to this day a stone upon which is carved, "*Pray for the souls of James Lally and his family*, 1673." A grandson of this James Lally sat in King James's Irish Parliament, fought at the Boyne, and went with Sarsfield into exile, forfeiting his estate of Tullinadaly. He died of a wound received at the siege of Montmélian.

His brother Gerald, who shared his exile, was one of those more lucky Irishman, who, having won a French lady's heart, settled down in France. His son was the first to break, sword in hand, into the flank of the English column at Fontenoy. For his services he was ennobled, and chose as his title "Lally de Tollendal," a corruption of the name of the old estate. There are many Lallys in France to this day, and the name has honor. Indeed there are countless French-speaking men and women who bear famous Irish names, such as Talbot, O'Brien and Adair. They are the descendants of the brilliant band of exiles who came over when the Wild Geese took wing for France.

KING JAMES, who had fled with haste to St. Germain after his defeat at the Boyne, reviewed his faithful Irish when they landed, and received them with gracious words that, God knows, were well deserved. Many of those to whom he spoke had been men of wealth and family who had stripped themselves to the bone for loyalty's sake. All of them had left friends and families and their loved native land for him. And it is worth remembering that the Irish, although they prosper upon foreign soil, yield to no people in the

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world in their passionate love for their own land. It is even with bleeding, aching hearts that they force themselves to leave their green wet plains and hills to cross the seas.

So he thanked them, the lean, dark-faced, exiled Stuart King. He also is one of the tragic figures of history. In his youth he had been brave, dashing and generous. He had won great sea-fights, and the greatest general of the day had praised his bearing in land battles. But as was the way with many of the Stuarts his blood had chilled and weakened in middle age. Now he had become a cruel bigot and something of a coward. At the Boyne he had refused to lead a charge that might have turned the day. He had preferred to spur for safety, with querulous complaints of the cowardice of the men who were dying for him. After that lost battle Sarsfield made the famous remark—

"Exchange but Kings, and we will fight it over again!"

WITH all his faults, James won and retained the loyalty of his Irish. These thousands who had followed him into exile were content to accept poor pay and to serve beneath a foreign flag, rather than yield to him they called the Usurper. And of the officers there were many who made higher sacrifices. Commissions could not be found for all, and many captains shouldered a musket without complaint and served as simple privates.

And so they were formally enrolled, the Irish Brigade, in the scarlet uniforms that were to become famous on so many ghastly fields. They were to win countless tributes for their light-footed, unfailing dash. A great King, Louis, the Sun Monarch himself, was to write of them with his own hand—

I am persuaded that what is possible these Irish regiments will do, and what they promise they will perform.

Another Louis, upon a later day, was to thank them in person after Fontenoy for the battle they had won. General Vendôme, the brilliant French general, said often that there were no chargers like them, even his own dashing French. And most impressive of all perhaps was the tribute won, after Fontenoy, from the stolid George the Second of England. When he had learned who the Irish had saved the day and snatched a victory for France, he exclaimed with quite unusual emotion—

"Cursed be the laws which deprive me of such subjects!"

Certainly if France and Europe were the gainers, Great Britain was the loser by the faith and hate which drew the Irish across the seas. It is estimated that during the fifty years following 1691 no fewer than 450,000 Irishmen took service in the armies of France alone.

When the small population of Ireland is considered, and it is remembered that additional thousands of Irishmen accepted service in other foreign armies, these figures are impressive. But under the ferocious Penal laws a Catholic Irishman's life was literally not worth the living in his own land.

Their priests were hounded to death. Their religious services were held beneath the shadow of the sword. Their trade was deliberately ruined. To give one instance, the Irish manufacture of wool was by its prosperity a cause of jealousy to English weavers, producing five million dollars a year at the least. It was stifled out of existence by the law.

Any Protestant, if he chanced to take a fancy to the horse of a Catholic, could force him to sell it for five guineas. There is no need to multiply examples of injustice. Ireland was treated with brutality by England, and that brutality bred hate which, despite more generous years, is flickering to this day.

And that is why the flight of the Wild Geese became a yearly exodus. The recruiting was conducted upon business-like lines, and was a steady source of profit to those concerned. Agents and vessels were employed for the purpose by both France and Spain. The penalty for such recruiting was death, and the offender was tried by a jury upon which no Catholic might sit, but nothing checked the steady winging of the Wild Geese.

EVERY year smuggling vessels, rakish brigs and schooners, went flitting along the lonely coasts of Kerry, Clare and Connaught. They were freighted with brandy, claret, laces and silks. They also carried Irish officers and Irish friars.

Into lonely creeks and harbors slid

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those daring crafts, and the disguised recruiting officers were landed to do their work. They told a glowing story to the sturdy, English-hating peasants of the welcome and good pay awaiting them in "the Brigade." Cruelty, poverty and injustice were their lot at home. In France and Spain they would find that Irishmen were held in high regard. They would be among brothers, among Irish-speaking brothers. Above all, they would be given the chance to fight against the accursed English!

Never did they tell their story to deaf ears. The prospect of a fight to an Irishman is like the offer of wealth to men of colder blood. And when in addition revenge and the glutting of old hate was promised—recruits poured in. The smuggling crafts put back to sea with wool beneath their hatches, in place of the silk and brandy, and about their decks and in their cabins a swarm of ragged, bright-eyed, sturdy boys. And so the youth and strength of Ireland was drained away, and the Irish Brigade kept up its fighting strength. The Irish fields were left untilled, but there was no battle-field of Europe that was not wet with valiant Irish blood.

Lord Mountcashel, Colonel O'Brien and Colonel Arthur Dillon were and remained in command of the three regiments which had formed the first nucleus of the Irish Brigade in 1690.

Lord Mountcashel, who had the royal blood of the Desmonds in his veins, became a Lieutenant-General of France. He served with the Irish Brigade with high distinction in Savoy, Catalonia and in Germany.

Colonel O'Brien's record of service is extraordinary, even for a fighting Irishman. We find him in the midst of hot work in Italy, Germany and for six campaigns in Flanders. He fought at Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, Malplaquet, Douay and Landau. These are only the more notable battles of his career. Time and again he was wounded, time and again he won new laurels at the head of his regiment of O'Brien or Clare. He had fairly earned the sleep upon the bed of honor that came to him in 1720.

There was always a Dillon at the head of Dillon's regiment. They tell a characteristic story of Arthur Dillon, son of Lord Henry, the last colonel of that famous regiment. After years of active service for France he perished in 1794 amid the red horrors and carnage of the French Revolution. During the last drive in the tumbril to the guillotine he found himself beside a young lady to whom he spoke words of encouragement. She was brave with the wonderful courage of delicate women until she had climbed the greasy ladder, and the executioner touched her significantly upon the shoulder with his stained hand. She was to be the next to die. For the first time she shuddered, and turned to Colonel Dillon, murmuring—

"Oh Monsieur Dillon, will *you* go first?"

The old white-haired Colonel bowed with ready gallantry—

"Anything to oblige a lady," he said smilingly, and passed before her to his end.

IT WOULD be impossible within reasonable limits even to notice every important battle in which the Irish Brigade won fame. From the first they held their own with the French veterans, for long the most noted fighters in Europe.

By sheer dash and hardihood they won their right to an equal brotherhood of arms with the very flower of Louis' armies. It was even said of them that in gay recklessness they were the peers of the Garde du Roi, that splendid regiment of gentlemen officered by nobles and princes of the blood, who at Steinkirk were flung forward to save the day against the Allies when all seemed lost. They had not expected orders to charge, and they ran forward laughing merrily, with their rich lace scarfs flowing unfastened at their throats. After that brilliant and bloody victory a new fashion in neck scarfs, called the Steinkirk, came into vogue in honor of the Garde du Roi.

Upon the tattered colors of the Irish Brigade was stamped a lengthy and splendid scroll of battle names. For a hundred years there was no powder burned in Europe on any field that did not echo to the shrill Irish charging yell. It was never their way to charge in silence.

They had their little fads and fancies, had the Irish Brigade. They preferred the "white arm," the bayonet, to the bullet. They liked to charge, as they charged at Fontenoy, *with empty guns*. And they were at their very best when a height had to be carried, a fortified height masked with the smoke and flame of cannon fire, from which even the bravest troops had reeled

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back despairingly. Then the word would be passed along "Forward the Irish! Let the Irish try!" and the red-coated regiments, which had been held chafing in reserve, cursing sullenly at the folly of all generals, would be unleashed at last.

At a light-footed run, with that wild pealing yell, with the laughter of boys at play, they would vanish into the hell of flame and smoke. And without victory it was not their habit to return. In a little while their charging yells would change to Irish cheers of triumph. One more forlorn hope had succeeded, one more victory had been won for France at cost of Irish blood.

LET us glance, almost at random, at a few of the more famous fields from which the Irish Brigade plucked laurels either in victory or defeat. It is worth remembering that France, off and on for fifty years, was facing the coalition of half of Europe, which William of Orange had formed.

In 1693 the official French account of the great battle of Marsaglia in Italy apportions the chief credit of victory to the Irish Brigade. Frenchmen, brave to a fault themselves, are ever generous when their hearts are stirred by the spectacle of dashing courage. At this battle the famous Prince Eugene, Duke of Savoy and, with Marlborough, many times a victor against France, had almost his first taste of Irish fighting-men. They were to win from him a respect that was not unrueful in the years to come.

At a critical stage in the battle the Irish Brigade was pushed forward against a formidable redoubt. The Irish, with characteristic bravado, advanced holding their muskets with the butt ends upward.

The Allies held their fire, supposing these strange foes intended to desert. They had a rude awakening. With a wild yell the Irish stormed into the redoubt and drove out its holders in headlong flight. And then, in teeth of all discipline, the Irish, disregarding their orders, charged upon the heels of the flying foe. It is said that, with their light-footed speed and dash, they actually overtook retreating cavalry. The French, accepting the situation, charged behind them and the day was theirs!

After that battle, recruits were sorely needed for the Irish Brigade. As usual, they had suffered hideously. The Irish have never learned a prudent economy of blood or valor.

At Cremona, Eugene was again to encounter the Irish Brigade, and again he was to regret the meeting. The battle was fought out in the streets of the town, and there is no form of war so bloody as determined street-fighting. It seemed that the genius of Eugene had won the day for the Allies.

But again the Irish intervened. Major Mahony, called later the Murat of his day, was in command of an Irish regiment some six hundred strong. It was said of him that "his life was a continued chain of dangerous combats, desperate attacks and honorable defeats." He had ever a keen eye for the crux of a fight. With his little force he fairly held the Allies in check, giving the reeling French time to recover and reform.

Eugene, raging with impatient fury at this unexpected stand, attempted to bluff the situation. He sent an officer with a flag of truce to the Irish leader, saying that Mahony's position was hopeless, that he himself was loath to exterminate men so brave, and suggesting that the Irish should surrender and change sides. He offered them double pay and all privileges in the service of the Allies. Beyond doubt he looked upon these "Irish savages" as mere mercenary soldiers of fortune, prepared to draw sword for the highest bidder.

Mahony's answer was curt. He sent word that if Eugene waited for the Irish to change sides he would wait till Doomsday! He and his men owed faith and loyalty to the King of France, and he was prepared to fight out the battle as it stood to the bitter end.

And the battle was fought out and, thanks to that Irish handful, the day was saved for France. Mahony's regiment lost 350 out of 600 men—a cruelly significant proportion. It is but just to these Irish soldiers of fortune to record that their loyalty and even passionate affection for France and her King never faltered in the teeth of all temptation. France had given generous refuge to their own King, and that fact was never forgotten. Their love for France was only equaled by their bitter hate for England. It was their custom to charge, yelling—

"France, France, and to —— with England!"

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AT SCHELLEMBERG, one of the most bloody fights of any war, the Irish Brigade again won honor, although upon the losing side. Marlborough, the brilliant English general, was in command of the Allies, and his great name was as yet unmade. He had only greedy ambition and a full consciousness of his own great powers. But for a while it seemed as if the day were to go against him. The French were strongly posted. Marlborough, his handsome, high-bred face impassive as always, despite the desperate flame of anxiety within his heart, watched his troops recoil from the attack, leaving eight thousand of their best behind them.

It was a moment for a great gambler's final throw. Marlborough, perfumed, with rich lace at throat and wrists, put himself in person at the head of his sweating, dusty, disheartened men. And he had the personal magnetism that inspires victory. Behind him his men were irresistible.

The French broke in wild confusion. Their flight was a desperate rout. Through the wild day the Irish Brigade, under Lieutenant-General Lee, had done marvels. And now they did not join the *sauve qui peut.* Lee cut a way clear through the triumphant enemy, with his three unbroken regiments, and retreated without dishonor.

At Blenheim, Marlborough's greatest battle, the part the Irish played was almost identical. Three Irish regiments held the village of Aberklaw, one of the keys to the French position. Through the wild roar and tumult of the long red day the Irish held their ground. All along the line the French, ill led and handled, were giving way, were crumpling before the savagely resolute assaults of the Allied troops.

One hundred and sixty thousand men were fighting almost blade to blade. The Irish never wavered. Again and again the Allies charged upon the very points of their bayonets, hurling hand grenades and pouring in volleys of musketry at murderous range, only to recoil from that lean scarlet line.

By evening the day was wholly lost for France. Their shattered cavalry attempted to rally behind the unshaken Irish, but panic swept like fever through the rest. They broke in wildest flight. But the Irish—it is on record that they hewed a way from the flaming village they had held so long, and effected a cool retreat to the Rhine, unbroken amid the whirling wreckage of what had been a magnificent army of France.

At Ramillies, at Oudenarde and in the seige of Lille the Irish proved yet again that they could be as stubbornly gallant in defeat as they were dashing in victory. Through the three months' siege of Lille a regiment of reduced Irish officers, serving as privates, did gallant work.

At Malplaquet, one of the grimmest of battles, a forlorn hope of Irish regiments was flung against the triumphant Allies when the tide had turned against the French. The Irish charged the detested English with mad hate. Their wild fury would have turned the day, if it had been within the power of any troops in the world to achieve the feat. But once again the Irish Brigade could win only honor. And as for their losses—God knows that Irish blood has always been too cheap!

BUT of Fontenoy, "famed Fontenoy," there is a different tale to tell. Of all the battles fought by the Irish Brigade this perhaps is the one of which Irishmen love most to speak, remember with the keenest pride. For at Fontenoy was won vengeance for the Boyne and Limerick; at Fontenoy the Irish Brigade snatched victory from the very jaws of defeat, when the most brilliant living general of France conceived that the day was lost.

No Englishman grudges the Irish the glory of that day. The English troops themselves came near to achieving the impossible, as Marshal Saxe himself admitted, and startled the world by an exhibition of stubborn hardihood that has seldom been excelled.

Fortunately for France, the whole of the Irish Brigade were at Fontenoy. They consisted of the infantry regiments of Clare, Dillon, Bulkeley, Roth, Berwick and Lally, and the cavalry regiment of Fitz-James. They were under the command of Charles O'Brien, Viscount Clare and Earl of Thomond, who was afterward to become a Marshal of France, with the title of Maréchal de Thomond.

The French and Irish were skilfully drawn up upon the north side of the Scheld, upon an advantageous slope, with the village of Fontenoy as their center. Their line extended from the wood of Barry on the

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left to the village of Antoin on the right.

Marshal Saxe, brilliant and dissipated, had placed one hundred and ten pieces of cannon along his front, in redoubts to form cross and converging fires. So confident was he in the strength of his position that he permitted the King of France and his eldest son to view the battle from Fontenoy behind the French center. Afterward Saxe stated frankly that he had not believed there could be a commander daring or foolish enough to attack in face of such a raking fire.

He did not appreciate the peculiar character of the Duke of Cumberland, the commander of the Allies. The Duke, who was to win sinister fame as the Butcher of Culloden, had few qualities of value in a general. He had but the slightest knowledge of tactics. Strategy and the ordinary rules of war were as sealed books to him. But he was entirely without fear, in his stolid, stubborn fashion, and he was hampered by no petty scruples with regard to the sacrifice of his men. He was prepared, nay, he enjoyed, to put his own life at desperate hazard, and he exacted the same daring from the troops he led.

It was his fate to win only one battle, that of Culloden. But he came desperately near to winning a great triumph at Fontenoy. The issue for a while hung upon a hair's breadth.

As an Irish poet wrote with pardonable pride—

> And Fontenoy, famed Fontenoy, had been a Waterloo,
> Were not those exiles ready then, fresh, vehement and true!

THE Duke of Cumberland ordered two attacks to be made upon the right and left of the French line. Simultaneously he put himself at the head of a great column of fifteen thousand British and Hanoverian foot, and with twenty cannon marched straight at the center of the French position.

Few such frontal attacks have ever been made in war. But then, few commanding officers have been capable of such brave stupidity. The thing was incredible, impossible, absurd! But it came near, marvelously near, to splendid triumph.

Scarcely could Marshal Saxe believe his eyes. His hundred and ten pieces were belching death. No men could hold on in the teeth of such a fire. But the great, slow, stubborn column held on. The very flower of the French army, horse and foot, were flung against it. It smashed them contemptuously aside and surged superbly on. At its head the Duke still sat his great horse, stout and unwieldy in the saddle, his heavy face stolidly impassive as an image carved of wood.

Beyond Fontenoy, to the very heart of the French center, the column forced its way. And then it halted for a bare breathing space, waiting for supports. Victory was within its grasp. The French center was pierced. If support but came, nothing, nothing could save the French from utter, disastrous ruin.

But support did not come. The attacks upon the right and left had failed. The column must lose or win the battle without aid. And in its stubborn valor it was fully prepared to win. It had lost heavily under that murderous fire, but it was quite unshaken. Much had been achieved. One little breathing space, and it would pluck the victory almost within its grasp!

And there you have the dramatic crisis of the battle. Marshal Saxe had given up hope. He had hastened to King Louis, begging him to seek safety with the Dauphin while they might. The day, he believed, was lost. But an impatient Irishman thought otherwise.

THE Irish Brigade had been held in reserve, chafing like leashed dogs. Now at this crisis Colonel Lally hastened to the Duke of Richelieu, "raging that the devotion of the Irish Brigade should not be turned to account." And he had a most pertinent proposal to make. He suggested in effect that the four cannon of the reserve should be turned upon the head of the column, and that then the Irish Brigade should be loosed against it.

The Duke saw the value of the suggestion. At the least it was a moment for desperate expedients. He hastened to Marshal Saxe, who was with the King urging him to fly. They say that the Duke, like the adroit courtier he was, made the proposal as his own. Be that as it may, Marshal Saxe acted upon it without delay.

The column was to be shaken by cannon-fire, and then a general surrounding attack by infantry was to be made upon it. It was no moment for half measures. The Maison

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du Roi itself, with two other choice cavalry regiments, should be flung upon the column's head. Three infantry regiments should charge it on the left. Upon the right the Irish Brigade, supported by two French foot-regiments, should be given its longed-for chance.

And when word came to those straining Irish regiments a wild shrill yell pealed up.

"Remember Limerick and Saxon perfidy!"

Scarcely they waited for the cannon fire to open new gaps in the great stubborn column, jaded and sweating from its furious efforts. They did not wait at all for the other regiments to gain position for the simultaneous attack. They were fresh and unwearied, and they had been leashed too long. They saw their old hated foes before them, and it was at last their right to charge!

And they charged as only the Irish mad with hate can charge.

In advance of the cavalry, with a start of the attack upon the left, the fleet-footed Irish regiments drove down like a raging steel-tipped wave upon the column's flank. And worthily it met them, despite its weariness and losses.

Until the last moment the English held their fire. Then they loosed a shatteringly destructive volley. Colonel Dillon went down before it at the head of his regiment. Lord Clare was struck by two bullets, his cuirass saving his life. The Irish did not return the fire.

And through the drifting smoke
With empty guns clutched in their hands the headlong Irish broke!

It was an affair of but ten minutes. Within that narrow space of time the battle of Fontenoy was lost and won. That Irish rush was not to be withstood by half-exhausted men. The column reeled and gave ground. There was no rout, no confusion, no disordered flight. As it had come in honor, with grim, stubborn courage, almost to triumph, so did the great column make its slow retreat.

There was no pursuit. It is probable that Marshal Saxe was only too thankful to escape so handsomely from a desperate plight. The Allies lost eight thousand men, the French seven thousand. The Irish Brigade lost ninety-eight officers and four hundred men, killed and wounded. The officers charging at the head of their men suffered severely from that withering English volley at close range.

There were honors and to spare for the Irish Brigade after Fontenoy. Louis the Fourteenth came next day to their camp and thanked each regiment in turn for its services. Lally, whose timely suggestion had saved the day, was publicly embraced by the Dauphin, an embarrassing honor which doubtless caused him secretly to writhe, and promoted on the field before the Army to be a Brigadier of the King.

Generous promotion was meted out to all the officers, and rewards in money were given to the rank and file. One may not doubt that for the next few days the provost marshal was a sorely overworked man. Irish soldiers, magnificent in the face of the enemy, have their little weaknesses in peaceful days.

IN 1792, after a hundred years of faithful and glorious service of France, the Irish Brigade was disbanded. The Bourbons later presented to its officers a parting flag inscribed, "1692—1792. *Semper et ubique fideles.*" It may not be denied that the tribute had been well earned. Upon foreign soil, beneath an alien flag, the Irish soldiers of fortune had won a stainless reputation for loyalty, discipline and valor that has been equaled by no similar body of troops in the history of war.

The fame of the Wild Geese, the Gipsy soldiers of Europe, will endure till this world is cold and gray, till men are old before their prime, till the sap of youth has all run dry. About their very name there lingers the romance and glamour of luckless chivalry, of tender faith, of shattered dreams.

As an Irish writer has well said—

"If you look for Ireland's glories in the eighteenth century, you will find them everywhere, except in Ireland."

The pity of it, that it should be so!

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GROUPS of men straggled through the sage-brush and then, bending almost double, raced clumsily and to all appearance slowly across the wide stretch of sand. One, a tall, thin man, threw up his arms and pitching forward on to his face lay sprawling helplessly, a dark mass in the blaze of the sun. The others passed on to the shelter of the high ground on the near side of the dried-up river, where they took cover and opened fire once more.

On the parched hillside that rose gradually from the valley a crowd of ranch-folk, cow-punchers, miners and Mexican refugees, men, women and children, together with a sprinkling of Eastern visitors, tourists with motor-cars, and, of course, the soldiers of the infantry detachment on duty, had gathered to watch the age-old sport, the killing of men.

For the most part they waited for the inevitable end in grim silence, as spectators of some tragedy, staged in a setting such as no theater could have hoped for, desert and foothill and mountain, range upon range, blue against the blue of the sky, shimmering in the heat, with the drone of musketry an obligato accompaniment that stirred the pulses of those that heard.

When the tall, thin man pitched forward on to the sand there was a sudden murmur of voices. The tension seemed to snap. A cow-puncher swore under his breath; a soldier gave a jarring, nervous laugh; and a woman whose linen duster covered a costume cut after the fashion of Fifth Avenue began to whimper.

A large, pale, flabby man with a double chin and eye-glasses glared at her angrily.

"S'sh!" he whispered. "Can't you keep quiet a minute or two?"

In the far distance white uniforms showed here and there in the mesquite, advancing steadily.

"There they come! Look at 'em! Federals, see!"

The major who commanded the detachment, standing with two younger officers at the whitewashed stones that marked the boundary, turned and gazed vacantly at the crowd.

"You——" he began. Then he shrugged his shoulders and stared once more through puckered eyelids at the fight, his face set in a troubled frown.

After all, what business was it of his? These people could not be ignorant of the risks they ran! Would they thank him for interfering? The answer made further anxiety unnecessary. They would move when it suited them.

There was a droning overhead as of mosquitoes.

"Wha's'at?" asked the large man with the double chin and the eye-glasses. "Hey? Wha's'at noise?"

A first-sergeant, gray as a badger, burned

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to the color of old leather, scarred wickedly from the corner of his mouth to his chin, smiled.

"That," said he as one whom long acquaintance had made callous. "Them's bullets."

And the large, flabby man whose dollars, accumulated wholly by the toil of others, made his own life too precious to be risked, edged his way to the rear of the crowd.

The clatter of rifles grew louder and yet louder.

"It won't be long now, anyways," said the sergeant. "Their nerve's goin' quick. See! They're scairt."

And the major, a wiry, straight-backed little man with fierce eyes and a kindly smile, nodded. He too had read the signs. The end was very near.

"Don't tell me greasers can't fight," said a ranchman in a cotton shirt and overalls. "Don't you tell me. I know better'n that. I do so."

A private, lounging against the side of the shack, with his hands thrust into his belt, grunted.

"Greasers fight! Shucks! Don't yuh think it!"

"They're wipin' the airth with that thar bunch, anyways. An' most uh *them's* white, ain't they?"

The ranchman was unconvinced, having faith in the evidence of his own senses.

"Thar's about fifty all told," said the soldier. "An' are they soldiers, hey? No. They ain't. Hoboes by the look uh them. Fifty hoboes they is, fightin' reg'lar troops, hundreds uh them, an' holdin' their own. An' yuh say greasers can fight! Yuh gotter show me!"

The major bit his lips. Against his will, almost regretfully, he must take steps to protect the lives of those whose presence, whose very existence even, angered him.

"Sergeant," he said and crooked his finger.

"Sir," said the sergeant, stepping forward and saluting.

"Carter, what do *you* think? Any danger of those people being hit?"

"Maybe there is, sir; maybe." The sergeant spoke as one whose hopes may yet be realized. "But what's the good, sir? Besides, they're not firin' in this direction, sir."

"They daren't," said one of the lieutenants.

A flicker of amusement crossed the major's face and he raised his eyebrows.

"Daren't they, Stewart?" he said. He glanced at the other young officer. "What about it, Maynard? You've been on the border longer than Stewart, haven't you? Ever been fired on from across the line?"

"Me!" Maynard grinned. "I guess so. Say, they'll be making for the United States very soon, won't they? Looks like it, doesn't it, Sergeant Carter?"

"Yes-sir," said the sergeant. "They'll break in—in ten minutes or less. See! Thar's two more of 'em down now." He pointed to where, in an open space in the greasewood, two men lay very still, as if resting from their labors.

"Dam' renegades!" came a voice from the crowd. "What they doin' mixin' in what don't concern 'em? They ain't Mexicans, most o' them, are they? They're Americans."

"Cut it out!" said another. "You'd be thar, too, but for the uniform. An' yuh know it."

"What's keepin' em?" said Maynard. "It's hopeless now."

"Ah!" said the major softly. "Hopeless, of course." He paused. "Maynard, they'd have been over the line half an hour ago but for that man. He won't let them."

"I've noticed him," said the young officer. "But what's the good?"

"No good at all," said the major.

And once more, frowning thoughtfully, he watched the fight in the valley: the line of dirty white uniforms advancing through the mesquite, and the rebels holding their ground on the river-bank, with the thick-set, stocky man crouching behind them or hurrying from point to point whenever the fire slackened.

Three of the rebels jumped to their feet and made as if to retreat, but the thick-set man threatened them with the butt of his rifle, and they sank to earth reluctantly. One who hesitated he grabbed by the arm and forced to his knees.

And the major smiled as if he too were by the side of the thick-set man in the sage-brush.

"He can't hold 'em much longer, sir," said the sergeant.

"No," said the major. "No, Carter, he can't." He spoke as one who weighed his words with due caution. "He'll do his best. Wonder who he is and where he comes from?

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He's too good a man to be wasted on a fight like this. Far too good."

"The worst man is sometimes better'n the best when it comes to a scrap," said a dry, rasping voice at his elbow. "That man thar—well, he's a fighter, but it don't say he's not the biggest crook that ever pulled a gun, does it?"

THE major, resenting the tone, turned and looked at the man who had spoken. Something in his appearance or manner chilled him, brought out all the stiffness and aloofness of which his temperament was capable.

The man was a stranger, a civilian, whom he had seen that morning for the first time talking to the immigration officers at the customs-house: a lean, round-shouldered man in dusty garments, with the upper part of his wrinkled, sun-dried face hidden by the shadow of his hat brim, and his mouth set in a tight-lipped smile that meant much—or little.

The major hesitated a trifle scornfully and eyed him from head to foot.

"Know him?" he asked. For although he, as a regular, had all the regular soldier's contempt and pity for the undisciplined mob who fought in the valley, yet the broad-shouldered, thick-set man in command had won his respect and admiration.

The stranger gave a shrug. "*Quien sabe!* Maybe." He looked at the officer sideways. "If he's the man I'm after—well, he won't be too pleased when he sees *me* here. We ain't met fer two years now, more'n two it is. I knew him well: what's more, I didn't care for him pertic'lerly, either."

"Oh!" said the major politely. "Oh, indeed! That doesn't say he's not brave, does it? And others might find good in him if you didn't." He paused. "Do you live near here?" he asked.

"No," said the other. "I come from the north uh the state." He spoke as one who was jealous of his dignity. "MacKenzie's my name, an' I'm a dep'ty-sheriff, down here on a visit: business, mostly, seein' the country." And he smiled dryly and waited, rolling a cigarette between his fingers.

The crackle of the rifles was lost in a muffled drumming, at once spiteful and sustained. A shout went up from the crowd as the rebels in twos and threes rose to their feet and ran, like flies scrambling across a tract of sticky fly-paper.

"Look!" said the sergeant. "They're breakin'."

"Here they come!" said Maynard.

"Jane," called the stout man in the eyeglasses, looking wildly around. "Jane, where've you got to? You're missing everything. They're running."

"Huh!" said the deputy-sheriff. "Huh! That damfool Easterner! You'd think he'd paid fer the whole show an' wanted his money's worth. Dam' fool! Clackin' about like an old hen!"

And the major nodded his head in sympathy. The man jarred on his nerves, but in this at least he spoke the truth.

"I guess this is the end at last, isn't it, sir?" said Maynard.

"They can't stand up against machine-guns," said the major. "Poor devils!"

He strolled away with his hands clasped behind his back, and stood apart from the others, staring down at the fight in the sage-brush.

EVEN as the watchers on the hill had said, so it was—the end.

If on the blood-stained field of Waterloo, seasoned troops, as fine as could be found the world over, turned at the cry of "*Sauve qui peut!*" and fled, so now in this skirmish in the sage and cactus did a handful of tired, hungry, undisciplined men, the outcasts of half-a-dozen nations, take to their heels.

They had fought stubbornly, held by the fear of one man. Time after time they had wavered and fallen back, until at each backward glance they could see the trail that led to the cluster of red shacks on the hillside and the flag and the crowd watching.

Weariness had stiffened their backs to the fire of magazine-rifles. The withering blast of machine-guns was more than flesh and blood could endure. Not even the bowmen of Agincourt could have stood their ground against a modern infantryman crouching behind the steel shield of a Maxim, with its belt of death-dealing cartridges.

Neither blows nor the bitter curses of the man who had led them into the trap could keep the rebels in their cover on the river bank. They were beaten and unashamed. The infection of terror spread from man to man. Why wait to be killed? For the sake of their honor? The word held no meaning.

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For their country? Each fought for his own hand. Their countries were many.

A small man with a black mustache and broken teeth raised his head and swore.

"To —— with it! What's the use?"

"Shut up! Go on firin'!" and the leader, red-headed, broad of shoulder and thick-set, squat almost, glared at him from blood-shot eyes.

"Ain't gotten no more cartridges," retorted the other.

"Here! Take these."

Another, English, undersized, puny and struggling in the grip of many fears, laughed unsteadily.

"I wish I were back 'ome." Again he laughed and, raising his rifle to his shoulder, took aim and fired.

Five Mexicans, as by previous arrangement, leaped to their feet and ran. "*Adios!*" said the cockney. "We'll be with you presently."

One spun around, kicked like a wounded rabbit, and died. The red-headed man crawled over and took his cartridges.

"Pete," said the man with the broken teeth, "what good is it, anyways?"

"No good! But keep on! Kill some o' those devils, d'yuh hear!" He swore as at the far end of the line a group of men crept through the brush on hands and knees.

"Thar's the line back of us," muttered another. "The United States. We'll be home thar—under the darned old Stars an' Stripes."

"Ighn't my 'ome, partic'larly," said the Englishman. "An' they ain't over an' above pinin' for me anywhere."

Even at such a time and in such a place, with the bullets wailing overhead and knocking up spurts of dust on every side, his tongue wagged on.

"Oh! for God's sake shut up!"

"Let's clear off like the rest o' them. I'm sick of it, Pete. We're goin'. J'er hear?"

"I hear," said the red-headed man. "I hear. But you won't. I won't let yuh. You —— cowards! You white-livered skunks! Afraid, are yuh? Of a dam' bunch uh greasers! Fight! You just don't know what fightin' is."

That they had done their best mattered nothing. They were cowards: squirming under his eye, waiting their chance to escape. Before this they had boasted; now they ran.

The one virtue that a man should have they lacked. The primitive fighting instinct, the courage that knows not fear, surged through his veins, filled him with anger and scorn. Was he losing his grip? He must be. Or they would not have deserted him. And was he, a white man, a fighter, to give way, to show that he was beaten? By Mexicans! Even the machine-gun could not excuse that.

There was a sudden lull in the firing.

"Pete, you're comin' across with us, ain't yuh?"

"I am not," said the red-headed man. "I'm —— if I do. An' what's more, you won't neither."

" 'Ark at Oklahoma Pete!" said the cockney grinning white-faced over his shoulder. " 'Ark to his jaw! Seems to me he's right. All the same, cully, I'll beat it syme as the rest of yer."

"Why don't yuh stop the others goin', hey, Pete?"

Why! Oklahoma Pete snarled his answer. "They're greasers, *peons*, an' don't count. You're white. See! An' thar's white folks watchin' from the hill."

There was a strangled laugh from the men crouching in the brush.

FROM the other side of the wide bare stretch of sand there came the stabbing blast of the Maxim. The bullets smashed through the cactus and mesquite. Men scrambled to their feet. Blind panic seized them. The game was up. One short half-mile and they would be saved!

Oklahoma Pete, raving with fury, was on his feet.

"Get back, you! Back, d'yuh hear me!" His voice cracked. A big man tore through the brush toward him and he drove his fist into the heavy face as he was borne backward in the rush.

"You coward! Why don't yuh fight?"

The man tripped over him, stumbled for three or four steps, then regained his balance and kept on his way.

"Cowards, the whole durn' bunch uh yuh!" said Oklahoma Pete, sitting up. One by one they were slipping away like whipped curs.

"It's a bad place, fellers," said the man with the broken teeth. "Arizona looks pretty good to me right now."

"What we fightin' for, anyhow?" said another, slouching past. "I'm sick of it. Git up, Pete, you ain't hurt, are yuh?"

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The cockney knotted a shoe-lace. "It's time we was all movin'," he muttered. "Pete, don't be a bloody fool! I'm goin' to cryve the 'ospitality of a friendly nation. 'Ands acrost the sea, an' such like."

He stood up, spun around and went down in a heap, his head bent under his body and his hands pressing on the sand.

For a brief instant he remained in the attitude in which he had fallen: then very slowly he rolled over on to his side.

The red-headed man sitting with his hands clasped around his knees watched him almost unconsciously, as something of no interest. Then he raised his eyes and laughed weakly.

HE WAS deserted, alone in the midst of desolation: sand and cactus and brush and dead bodies, rifles and cartridge-belts and hats. The rough ground, the slope between the river bed and the customs-house was dotted with limping, hurrying figures, streaming onward in no order, each for himself, the remnants of his force in full retreat. It was no longer a defeat, but a rout. A mist dimmed his eyes and he swore under his breath, despising himself, and his kind. White man, and beaten by Mexicans! By machine-guns, perhaps! But by Mexicans, even so. And they had left him to fight single-handed! Could he? How? It was hopeless. One man against five hundred! What was the use of trying?

The chatter of the machine-gun from across the sand ceased and a sense of loneliness and desolation stole over the man who sat among the dead. He showed his yellow teeth in a snarl and spat in scorn. Then, still sitting, he lifted his rifle to his shoulder and sent a shot after his retreating force. He had no particular desire to kill, but it showed his scorn.

An uncanny stillness had settled over the field of battle. Nothing lived, save only himself.

Wearily he loaded his rifle.

"Pete," said a voice.

A strange thrill ran through him. Still seated, he swung around, gripping his rifle tightly.

Then he swore and cleared his throat.

"It's you, is it?"

Through the brush crawled one of his men, a youngster with a cut over one eye and his pale face smeared with blood and dirt.

"Thought you was dead," said the red-headed man ungraciously. "What you doin' here? Hey? Don't yuh know they'll be across the river in less'n five minutes?"

There was no answer. The boy shivered and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

And as Oklahoma Pete watched him curiously from the corners of his eyes he felt a certain admiration stirring within him. One man at least besides himself had scorned to run.

"Good boy!" he grunted. "But you're a doggon' young fool! You oughta have quit with the rest o' the bunch!"

"Guess I would have, but I got this cut over my eye. An'—guess I'm scared, too." He met the other's gaze weakly. Then he threw back his head and laughed. "Well, what's it matter, anyhow?" He waited. "Comin', Pete?"

Oklahoma Pete shook his head. "Nope. I ain't comin'." And he peered across the glistening white sand at the brush on the far side of the river-bed.

"What!" said the boy. "You ain't—shucks!" Again he laughed. "Thought you meant it. You can't stop here." He stared at the red-headed man with a curious wonder in his eyes.

"Son," said Oklahoma Pete, "you'd better go while the goin's good. It's no use stayin' here. Not a durn bit!"

"But—but what you stayin' fer, hey? Let's beat it to the United States. What d'yuh think you'll do, hey?" He was on his knees, grasping his rifle by one hand.

"Nawthin'," said Pete. "I'll work 'round to the right thar, maybe, an'——" He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not goin' up the hill to the line, not for no one. I'm goin' to keep on fightin'. But you, kid, you beat it! See!" He leaned sideways and caught hold of the boy's arm. "Get up! D'yuh hear? You beat it!"

Half doubtful, abashed by the other's tone, the boy rose to his feet. He hesitated.

"Pete—it's killin' yourself, committin' suicide!"

"Git, can't yuh! Are yuh crazy, standin' thar? You git!"

He turned his head swiftly and growled as a cluster of Federals showed on the high ground opposite. Raising his rifle, he steadied his elbows in the sand, cuddled his cheek against the stock and pulled the trigger. One of the Mexicans fell. The rest

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dropped to cover, like ground-squirrels.

As the bullets whipped through the air in reply, the red-headed man gave a grim chuckle. His heart quivered with a strange excitement. The fighting was not yet over. Some kink in his brain, a mule-like obstinacy that fought with common sense, kept him at full length on the sand, behind a pile of rocks and mesquite, gazing at the brush opposite from which came spurts of flame, a faint haze of smoke and the spatter of musketry.

"Pete, you'd better come."

"I tell you I ain't goin' to."

"But, Pete, you don't never mean to——"

"Fer God's sake!" He glared over his shoulder, resting on one elbow. "Ain't yuh gone yit? You go—now, d'yuh hear? At once! Or——"

The boy scrambled to his feet once more, muttered a brief "So long, then!" and ran off. He, too, like the small Englishman, toppled over in a limp heap.

Oklahoma Pete gazed at him, puzzled.

"Hullo!" he said. "What's the matter with yuh? Hit?"

A stifled moan answered him.

THE men on the hillside waiting under the Stars and Stripes saw the red-headed man crawl to the side of the wounded boy and bend over him.

"Look!" said Maynard. He turned to the major. "Look at that, sir! Isn't he ever coming across the line?"

The major glanced at the group of *insurrectos*, unclean and wretched and scared, waiting to be admitted into the United States as refugees, and the khaki-clad soldiers herding them like sheep.

"A damned fool like all of them!" he said gruffly. Yet in his heart he knew that his words were but a sham: a cloak to hide his feelings.

"What's the sense in bein' killed that way?" said a voice.

"Here, you," said the first-sergeant, "you hand over that gun o' yours! Savvy! Take it away from him, Peters."

"Say," muttered one of the refugees, "what in —— is Oklahoma Pete doin', hey?"

"Why don't he beat it?"

"Who's he got with him, hey? That Saunders or the Englishman?"

They watched him in tense excitement, their nerves tingling still with the strain of battle.

"Who's that man down there?" said the major sharply. "The big chap! American, isn't he?"

A shifty-eyed rebel, clad in torn overalls and a grimy shirt, cutthroat written on every feature, grunted:

"Him! That's Oklahoma Pete."

"He's a brave man, that!" The major paused, his keen, far-sighted eyes held by the drama in the sage-brush. "Ought to be a soldier, that chap. If I could get hold of him I'd have him in the regiment tomorrow." He clucked his tongue impatiently. "Why doesn't he—doesn't he come over while he's got the chance?" He struck the palms of his hands together. "Good Lord! look at him now, Maynard! Look, will you! He's going to carry him."

He gritted his teeth and from that moment the safety of the man they called Oklahoma Pete dwarfed everything. Nothing mattered but that—the life of a man he had never met.

"Hurry!" he whispered.

As he watched, holding his breath in sheer agony of mind, some one brushed by him. With a quick side-glance he saw MacKenzie, the deputy-sheriff, the thin, brown-faced man in the high-crowned hat, stretch past one of the soldiers and touch the shifty-eyed rebel on the arm.

"Say, sonny. What did yuh say was the name o' that feller that's down thar in the brush?"

"Oklahoma Pete!" said the other.

"It's him, then! It's Pete himself! Pete, of all men!" And his voice went thin and harsh. His eyes, no longer sleepy, gleamed with savage triumph, his lips twitched in a grim smile, his chin was thrust forward.

"Know him?" asked the sergeant.

"You betcher life I know him. Now he's got his hat off. Look at that red head o' his! O' course I know him."

The major, startled by the outburst, glared at him.

"Then you know a man that's worth knowing," he said. "You ought to be proud."

Later, after it was all over, and the coyotes disputed where men had fought, he remembered that MacKenzie had laughed, and the laugh held a grim meaning that haunted him.

IN THE brush Oklahoma Pete was bending over the wounded boy.

"It's hurtin', is it?" he said. He groped with clumsy fingers, tying a rough

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bandage as tenderly as a woman, mumbling curses the while.

"Pete, yuh gotter leave me! J'er hear? Beat it!"

Oklahoma Pete chuckled.

"Listen! I'm goin' to take yuh outer this, son. Catch hold o' my rifle till I've gotten my hands free."

"Don't yuh worry about me! You'll git hit yerself, Pete. You sure will."

Pete lifted the boy in his arms and stood up, grunting. "Aw! cut it out! I can't leave yuh whar them devils 'ull git yuh, an' yuh knows it."

Very slowly and cautiously he made his way over the rough, uneven ground that lay between him and the line, and the thin, brown-faced man who waited with the queer tight-lipped smile.

"Are there any more wounded?" asked the boy presently.

"No," he said. "None."

He lied; but to lie avoided all argument.

"One thing—you'll be outer this yerself now, Pete."

"I guess so," said Pete shortly. And the admission shamed him. He had not wanted this. Him! Of all men! Like any coward. Making his way across the line to safety. Anger surged over him. Damned cowards! To slink off and leave him!

He growled wearily. Even his strength seemed to be failing him when most needed.

On the side of the hill he could see the crowd waiting.

"Devil take the whole doggon' outfit! They'll say I'm scairt, uh course. Let them! I ain't. I wouldn't uv crossed the line, not one yard, but fer this."

AT THE customs-house the last of the rebels had been disarmed and hustled away by soldiers with fixed bayonets and scornful grins. But not even the fear of bullets could clear the hillside of spectators. They watched in silence the slow progress of the red-headed man and his burden. It seemed impossible that they could live to come through the storm of lead untouched.

The major, pacing to and fro like some restless animal, halted, muttering to himself.

"The bravest man I've ever seen. The very bravest! He'll do it. He can't fail now. He's out of aiming range. Those Mexicans! Shoot! Huh! *They* can't shoot!"

He groaned impatiently, chafing at the inaction.

Maynard, the big lieutenant, laughed nervously.

"Wish you'd let Stewart and me take a dozen men, sir, and——"

"Certainly not," snapped the major fiercely. "Nothing of the kind. Don't like it, even in fun." The pounding of his heart on his ribs seemed to check his breathing. "What a man! Maynard, I'd give a good deal to have that man in the regiment. He's wasting himself. If he gets out alive—I'll——He's too good to be killed in a scrap like this. Too—a-ah!" He caught his breath as he saw Oklahoma Pete stumble with his burden.

MacKenzie snapped out an oath. "Not now—not now, when he's come all this ways! He can't—not now. He'll do it. He must."

"He'll git here, Pete will. —— him! They can't kill him now. Them greasers can't. Come on, Pete! Only a few more yards. Them greasers won't git yuh. Sure they won't. You're bein' saved fer something worse'n bullets, Pete."

A grim foreboding came over the major. He shivered, as if the heat of the afternoon had passed and the wind from the desert chilled his blood.

The red-headed man swaying a little on his feet had reached the last slope.

"Come on, Pete! You'll make it!" whispered MacKenzie. "They can't touch yuh now, they can't."

The fire from the river slackening gradually had now stopped. The distant notes of a bugle sounded clearly in the stillness. Some one began to clap vigorously, foolishly; others followed.

"Fools!" said Oklahoma Pete, and despised them from the bottom of his heart.

His eyes wandered from the cluster of figures awaiting his arrival to the flag that hung from its staff above the red customs-house.

"What're yuh waitin' fer?" shouted a voice. "You're in Mexico now, but Arizona's near enough!"

"Are we there, Pete?" whispered the wounded boy.

"Purty near," he answered. "Purty near now."

He limped forward slowly, dragging his wounded leg.

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THE small major, the embodiment of his country's might, stood by the line of whitewashed stones that marked the boundary between the two republics.

"Ah! well, he's safe now. I'm glad of it."

"If," said Maynard, "that chap was in the army he'd get the medal of honor sure as little apples. Tough-looking specimen, too, isn't he?"

Oklahoma Pete had halted not six paces from the whitewashed stones and was gazing with grim disfavor at the clapping, cheering throng. He felt a sudden shame creep over him, a wish to slink off and hide. Fools! Making all that noise! Why couldn't they leave him be?

And then he saw standing with the soldiers and immigration officers a lean man in old, tattered clothes and a big hat; a man with a stern, savage expression in his eyes, and his hands thrust into his pockets with grim significance.

Oklahoma Pete choked.

"You!" he muttered. "*You!*"

The wounded boy stirred in his arms, groaned and looked up into his face.

"Pete," he whispered. "Pete, are we——"

"Yes, son, we're here now." He staggered forward to the whitewashed stones. "Take my pardner, he's all in. Don't touch me. D'yuh hear! Keep back!" He laid his burden gently down on the ground. Then he straightened up with a sigh and stepped back one pace.

The major held out his hand.

"You're safe now. You surrender to the United States, of course. I'd like to be the first to—to say I'm proud to belong to the same country as you do."

Oklahoma Pete, a hero against his wish, laughed and glanced at the man with the lean, brown face.

"Think so?" said Pete. "Hullo, MacKenzie, you here? Off your beat, ain't it? What yuh doin' in this part o' the state?" He leaned on his rifle and grinned.

"You know," said MacKenzie. "You know, Pete. I'm waitin' for you. Have been fer two years."

"What is it?" said the major testily. "What's the matter?" He stood a little to one side, staring from one man to the other, as if searching for the answer in their looks.

The clapping of hands and cheering had died away. A strange hush had fallen.

From the slope came a shrill voice: "Say, what're they doin' down there, now? Why don't they let him come in? My! I think he's a perfect dear, don't you, Sadie?"

The red-headed man, still on the soil of Mexico, began to laugh. Why didn't they let him come in? What a question!

"You want me, Mac, do you?" he asked.

"Yep. I do. What's more, I'm goin' to have you."

Oklahoma Pete grunted his scorn, his fierce, bloodshot eyes glaring from a mask of blood and dirt.

"I'd like to see yuh, Mac. I would so."

"What is it?" said the major. "Can't you speak, one of you two? You're wasting time."

"He knows, Pete does. He'll stand thar till he chooses to come over into the U. S. An' when he does——"

"Well," flared the major choking. "When he does! What the devil are you getting at, anyway?"

"When he does," continued MacKenzie imperturbably, "I'll have him safe. Whar I can lay my hands on him."

"What's the reward, Mac?" said Oklahoma Pete. "Dead or alive, hey? How much do yuh hope to git outer this, hey?"

The deputy-sheriff stepped forward across the stones.

"Sergeant Carter!" snapped the Major.

The sergeant reached out a long arm.

"Keep your own side of the line," he said. "Come on back!"

MacKenzie obeyed sullenly, his eyes fixed on Oklahoma Pete's scornful face.

"To —— with the reward! You know why I'm wantin' yuh all right. Dave was my pardner. I swore I'd git yuh if it took me a lifetime. I've been after yuh now on an' off fer two years. I said I'd git yuh, an'—" He laughed quietly. "An' I have."

"Ah!" Oklahoma Pete's lips curled into a sneer.

"They told me you were somewheres along the border. An' here you are walkin' right into my arms. Funny, ain't it?"

"Funny!" said the rebel. "Yes, it's funny. But you ain't got me, Mac, not by a dam' sight! You ain't man enough to take me, an' you know it. Back uh your talk, you're just yeller."

The major cleared his throat.

"You two!" he said sharply. "You'll have to explain. Understand!" He felt

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bewildered, lost; his brain seemed to have gone dull and heavy and stupid; the foundations of his whole being were shaken. He looked foolishly from one to the other, not understanding. Why couldn't the red-headed man cross the line into his own country and have done with it?

"Listen!" said MacKenzie. "Listen, major, an' judge fer yourself. That man," he pointed to Oklahoma Pete, "that man standing thar, lookin' as if he didn't know what in the world was wrong, that man's the biggest crook an' tin-horn gambler an' gunman between Mojave an' Flagstaff. He is. A thug. How many notches you got on that gun o' yours, Pete? He's a killer an' proud of it. Ask him how Dave Wheldon died, an' Steve O'Neill, an' Ned Brady. He'll tell yuh. Dave Wheldon was my pardner. Pete killed him, shot him down in cold blood, like a dawg, because he'd found him out. That's why I'm here. Major, that's the truth. Shot him down like a dawg!"

The major waited for the fierce denial that must surely follow. But no word was spoken. Had this man, as brave a man as ever fought a losing fight against hopeless odds, done these things? Was this man, this hero, a murderer? A fugitive from justice? An outlaw?

He stared at MacKenzie, grim and stern and relentless, and then at Oklahoma Pete, dirty and war-worn and tattered leaning carelessly on his rifle, smiling grimly. And in his half-closed watchful eyes he read the truth.

"You always was a durn' Methody preacher!" said Pete, moistening his dried lips. "Let's have some more of it."

"You better come on over," said MacKenzie.

The rebel held his ground.

"Stay right thar, whar yuh are, MacKenzie! This is Mexico. Keep in United States territory, if yuh please, or thar'll be trouble right now. More trouble than you're lookin' fer."

He wiped the blood off his chin, where a bullet had grazed him.

"Comin' over!" he continued, staring at the mass of wondering faces. "Not much! Wish I hadn't come this far! I do, fer a fact. I said I wouldn't. But them other pikers ran an' left me. I wouldn't uv come one yard but fer the kid. I'd uv been down thar in the sage an' cactus swappin' shots with the greasers like a man."

"What are you going to do, then?" said the major, and Oklahoma Pete glanced curiously at the spare, straight-backed little officer. "You can't stay there, you know. You've got to surrender yourself."

"Got to! Not much. You don't understand, hey? I killed. Uh course I killed. So would you, too, if you'd been raised same as I was, if you'd been in the places I've been. It's kill or be killed. Well, I'm not squealin'. Only you heard his side an' not mine. I know he's got the drop on me; he thinks he has, anyways. Don't yuh, Mac? You poor innocent!"

"Well, an' ain't I? I ain't followed yuh fer two years fer nothin'. You can't git away from me now, Pete. Not even you."

"Can't I? Can't I? You think a bit! Think hard! I swore you'd never git me, an' you won't."

"An' I swore I would. I'd foller yuh to the end uh the earth, Pete, just to see yuh swingin' at the end of a rope fer what you done."

The major, judging all men by one great standard, felt an inward loathing; not for the murderer, he at least had shown his manhood, but for the hard-faced, tight-lipped man who had tracked him down.

And yet a sense of fairness warned him of his error. Not even the man's dogged courage could hide the truth. He had murdered and must pay the penalty.

Pete, broad-shouldered, thick-set, clad in dirty, tattered clothes, with the blood soaking through the leg of his trousers, laughed hoarsely.

"Swingin' on the end of a rope, hey, Mac? Sorry to disappoint yuh."

Slowly and clumsily the little major groped in his mind for explanations. The man's sincerity staggered him. And yet—His thoughts broke. Every one was speaking at once.

An immigration officer and Carter, the first-sergeant, were arguing in angry undertones.

From the crowd pressing close to the line of sentries came a high-pitched giggle—

"Why don't he come in?"

And another voice answered:

"Don't he look awful? For the land's sake! He's worse'n any of them."

The major turned and glared.

"A dam' side show to them," whispered Maynard. "Poor devil!"

"Mac," Pete said, looking once more at

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the deputy-sheriff, "Mac, you said you'd follow me an' take me, didn't yuh? You can. I shot Dave Wheldon, o' course. It was him or me. You don't make no allowances fer that, do yuh? I had the luck. I beat it, 'cause I'd not have had a dawg's chance if they'd caught me. They liked Dave, the bunch did, an' they'd no use fer me. Never had. Ever think what that meant? See here, Mac, you've found me, ain't yuh? I'll let yuh take me. Hangin's not my death, though. It ain't worth it, somehow. You're right, Mac, I'd hang. Any one oblige me with a handful uh cartridges? I'm almost out."

He wiped the sweat from his forehead, and opened the breech of his rifle as if he loved it.

"Cartridges," said the major. "Of course not. What do you want cartridges for?" He noticed for the first time the blood-soaked trousers leg. "Hello! You're wounded, man! Did you know it?"

"It don't signify," answered Oklahoma Pete. "Not in the least. Mac, yuh said you'd foller me wharever I went. Will yuh? Now's yer chance. I'm off." He waved his hand carelessly toward the valley. "Comin'?"

"What are you talking about?" said the major. "Don't be a fool! You're not going down there to be killed and you know it!"

"To be killed!" said Oklahoma Pete turning on his heel. "I'd be killed if I stayed in my own country, wouldn't I? Uh course I would. I'm goin' to have a talk with the Fed'rals down thar in the sage. MacKenzie — well, thar's nawthin' to stop MacKenzie follerin' me, if he cares to, is thar?"

He slipped a cartridge into the breech of his rifle.

"Serves me right fer comin' up to the line at all! What do I want with the United States, hey? I'm fightin' in Mexico. Well —so long, fellers!"

WITHOUT a backward glance Oklahoma Pete limped off toward the valley and the burnt foothills, and the mountains and the white uniforms scattered through the brush on the near side of the river.

"My God!" said the major. "Poor devil! Poor, poor devil!"

Filled with a sudden bitterness against the man who had sent him to his death he looked at MacKenzie, who stood in an attitude of despair, his shoulders bowed, his arms hanging limply by his sides.

He raised his head, in his eyes was a look of dumb suffering.

"What could I do? I can't—I can't go after him. I've a wife at home waiting." He choked. "Suppose you blame me, don't yuh? *You* never saw Dave Wheldon killed! I did. He shot Dave an'—an'——" The harsh voice died away to a whisper.

And for him also was the small major sorry. Right or wrong he had done what he thought his duty.

Once more a strained silence descended on the crowd as Oklahoma Pete made his way slowly down the slope.

"Walking to his death," said the major bitterly. "Right to his death."

He stared in dumb pity at the square, thick-set figure, dark against the light, shimmering background. The man was alive, vibrant with energy and power, capable of evil or good. A few moments later and he would be dead, mere inanimate clay.

Only a miracle could save him now.

Again the firing opened. The crackle of musketry reached the watchers on the hill.

A woman began to sob.

"Mother of God!" said the first-sergeant, clutching the major's arm. "Look there. From the side, sir! See!"

A Federal soldier clad in his dirty white uniform was crawling toward the lone figure on the slope.

The major's teeth dug into his lower lip. Then he gave a smothered sigh as Oklahoma Pete swung round and fired.

The woman's sobs became louder.

"Take me away! Take me away! O-oh! You shouldn't have brought me. I ca-an't. I ca-an't. He'll be killed——" The voice ended abruptly as if smothered.

"Won't they never hit him?" said one of the soldiers. "Won't—— Look at him, will yuh! He's killed another! See. Down by the cactus."

"Not long now," muttered the little major; and he might have been waiting by the death-bed of one he had known through long years.

The murmur of voices came in disconnected fragments.

"They dursn't rush him. They dursn't!"

"I can't look no more. It's murder, that's what it is!"

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"Cowards, the whole doggon' bunch uh them!"

"Look! They're close up to that side. See 'em!"

There was a groan as Oklahoma Pete, facing the hail of bullets, staggered and dropped slowly on to his hands and knees.

"He's going," said the little major hoarsely. "They've got him."

"Not yet," said Maynard. "Not yet, sir."

"By golly! He's fightin' 'em yet! He's game. Game as they make 'em. You bet he is!" A private shook his fist at the fight. "Why ain't we thar? Why? Hey? Why ain't we?"

For a moment Oklahoma Pete had not stirred. Then, very deliberately, and, so it seemed, in pain, he sat up, propping himself against a rock, and went on firing.

THE end came quickly. After a few more shots, Oklahoma Pete fell forward and lay huddled up with his hands covering his face.

"Goldarn 'em!" With a yell a private raised his rifle, but a corporal yanked him back by the neck of his shirt. "Drop it, yuh durn' fool! Drop it! What d'yuh think you're doin'?"

The firing continued, then stopped abruptly, and the crowd on the hillside saw the Mexican soldiers approach the dead American and turn him over.

"That's all," said the major. "It's finished."

Heartsick and dispirited, he moved away. A hand plucked at his sleeve.

"Major." He found himself looking into the gray, lined, almost shriveled face of MacKenzie, the deputy-sheriff. "Major, say, *you* don't blame me, do yuh? Pete's dead. He deserved to die, major. He did really. He killed Dave Wheldon. Say, yuh don't think I done wrong, do yuh?"

The little officer shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't blame you," he said gently. "I can't. But I'm glad it happened the way it did." He paused, frowning. "I think, maybe, Oklahoma Pete has wiped out some of the score against him today."

He stared at the dead man lying where he had fallen, stretched out in the yellow evening sunlight, and MacKenzie, forlorn and dejected, walked slowly away, as much an outcast as the man he had driven to his death.

"They'll leave him to the coyotes," muttered the major. "They always do. He's too good for that." A curious pride of race swept through him. "Far too good!"

Later as he stood at his tent-door gazing out into the blue of the night there came to his mind the great idea.

Oklahoma Pete had died in action, dying as a soldier ought to die. Alive, he had been a murderer, a price set on his head; by his death he had proved himself a man, worthy of his country. Was he to go unburied? On foreign soil?

Surely he deserved a soldier's funeral!

SILENTLY soldiers of the United States crossed the border into Mexico and crept soft-footed in the sand to where Oklahoma Pete lay on his back, staring with sightless eyes into the dark, starlit sky.

"Got that flag?" whispered the major. "Wrap him up then quickly. Where's that stretcher? Here—gently now!"

He glanced from left to right, straining his ears for any sound, and hearing only the beating of his heart and the deep breathing of the soldiers with him. Far down the valley he could see the fires of the Federal camp burning red in the blackness.

From the river-bed there came the sudden challenge from a Mexican outpost and the crack of a rifle. Then silence.

"All right!" said the major. "They can't see us. Take him up."

It was in this manner, with an escort of armed men, saluted by sentries of his own race, as one deserving of high honors, that Oklahoma Pete, outlaw, murderer and hero, returned to his own country.

And next morning, before the sun was high in the heavens, three volleys and the clear, sad notes of "Taps" announced to the Federals in the valley the burial of an American soldier, killed in action.

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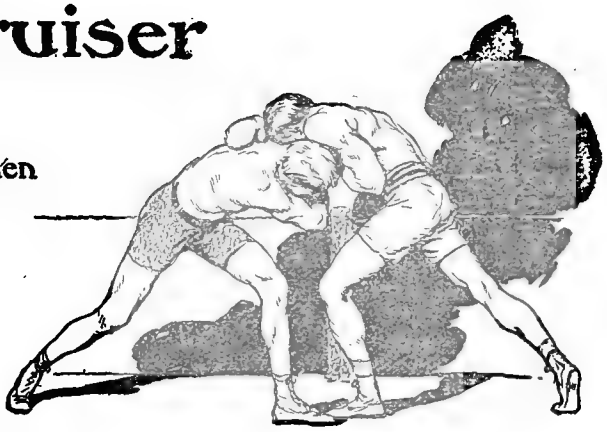
The Bruiser

By

Octavus Roy Cohen



THE tendency toward the unexpected is the most fascinating characteristic of the average person. Our lives are modeled along lines of thus and so, but that part of us which is known as "mind" rebels occasionally and prompts irrational acts.

Yet, realizing this, I couldn't help being surprised when the "Bruiser" showed himself to be intensely human, and the possessor of a full complement of rebellious emotions—by doing what, under an impelling force merely material, he would not have done. Of course the girl was to blame——

I ran across the Bruiser—he's known in the ring as "Terrible Tommy Daley"—down in Memphis, while I was writing the sports for one of the local sheets. The fight game was booming then, and our two clubs had been staging high-class bouts and making money at it.

One night they advertised a battle-royal between five youngsters as a wind-up to the main show. The lads who were scheduled to batter each other up indiscriminately that night were all well known, and the novelty of seeing fairly good white boxers in such a mêlée attracted me.

But when the time for the commencement of the battle-royal rolled around only four of the fighters appeared. Some one suggested Tommy Daley, who kept the corner news-stand, and they sought him. He came willingly enough and stripped right there in the ring. I grinned when I saw his really magnificent physique, and the other combatants nodded apprehensively.

A battle-royal stands in favor in the South. From five to eight men are put into the ring. The gong sounds and they mix. At the end of each three minutes the fighting stops, there is an intermission of one minute, and they're back for another round. If the fight starts with five men, four knockouts are guaranteed, and they generally come quickly unless the men quit. The crowd knew that four of the boys in the coming scrap were game to the core, and it watched eagerly.

The fight started, and after the manner of mortals since the world began, the weaker men banded together and sailed into Tommy Daley. Inside of one round he was knocked unconscious and carried from the ring; but he was cheered to the echo because of the wonderful fight he had put up for the two and a half minutes that he had weathered the fusillade.

Prompted by curiosity I followed his handler into the rough-board dressing-room, where they revived the red-headed kid. He opened his eyes, struggled to his feet, and tried to rise.

"Hey——" One of the attendants grabbed him, and Daley whirled.

"They framed up on me!" he snarled. "I'm goin' back there an' whip the whole —— crowd!"

Some spirit, eh? I don't know just why I spoke to him—at the time the idea that I'd ever manage a prize-fighter seemed repulsive, and I'd have laughed had some one suggested it. But I touched him on the arm.

"Not tonight," I advised. "But if you

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really want to get a fight here, I'll arrange it for you."

He looked me over for a minute, and then evidently recognized my face—you see they ran it every evening over my column of sporting chatter.

"This's Mister Collins, isn't it?" he said.

I nodded.

"Yes; I'm Collins. Any man with your build and spirit can make a fighter. If you really want a scrap I'll arrange to get you on in a four-round bout next Tuesday night with the winner of the battle-royal."

His forehead furrowed and his hands clenched.

"If I ever get one of them dogs in th' ring," he mouthed, "I'll kill 'im!"

I grinned—and the next day arranged the fight. And then I started training Daley personally. I'm fifty pounds heavier than he is, and they used to call me rather hefty with the gloves, but that youngster almost finished me several times during our training bouts.

THERE just wasn't anything to it the night he made his début in a regular bout against the battle-royal winner. He fidgeted until the initial gong and then he streaked across the ring. There came a couple of vicious grunts, a deluge of snappy blows and the other chap buckled at the knees and slipped to the canvas.

The referee stopped the fight then and there; and before Tommy had left the ring he was booked for a four-round bout the following week.

The morning paper next day enthused over Daley's work, and it was the sporting editor who gave him the nickname which has stuck ever since—Terrible Tommy Daley. Of course the "Terrible" part was a steal from Terry McGovern's *nom de guerre*, but it fitted just as well as it had the featherweight king.

Three fights followed at intervals of a week, and only one of them went as far as the third round; and all of them ended in knockouts. Finally Billy Canally, manager of our biggest local club, came to me to talk things over.

"Mr. Collins," he said earnestly, "that there Tommy Daley is a world-beater if he's managed right. You've got first call on him, but you're a newspaper man. I'm in the fight game. If you ain't goin' to handle him I want you to turn him over to me. There's a fortune to be made outa' that kid; and if you'll turn him over to me, I'll split the manager's share with you."

I smiled.

"Sorry," I answered easily, "but I'm goin' to manage him myself——"

Straight goods; that was the first time the idea had occurred to me; but I didn't have any scruples about the fight game like a good many people who don't know anything about it have, and I determined to do the best I could for the kid—of course pulling out financially as well as he did on a fifty-fifty basis.

I made him the flat proposition and he snapped me up. Then I got a sparring-partner who knew something about boxing, and we really got down to work. Right off the reel, though, I saw it was utterly impossible to teach that kid anything about the art of "self-defense." There wasn't any such word-combination in his fighting dictionary—he was a hyper-Nelson scrapper. Once let him get the gloves on, an opponent opposite, and permission to sail in—and it was good night! I actually had to get a larger sparring-partner, because his first one simply couldn't stand the lacing.

I made money with Tommy Daley, and Tommy made a name for himself that finally pulled an offer out of a good New York promoter, and we emigrated there.

IF I thought I'd seen Tommy fight before, I was mistaken. New York just seemed to get into his blood, and he went through a corking good bunch of second-class lightweights like a mowing-machine through new grass.

And New York went simply crazy—wild—dippy about him. It couldn't have enough. I shot his price higher and higher each time, and still the promoters came after him—and still he won his fights. Of course he didn't knock 'em all out; but it's an even money bet that those who lasted the limit wished that they hadn't. Not once did a newspaper decision go against him.

Best of all, the bright lights didn't lure. As a matter of fact Tommy was scared of them. He was a peculiar individual, was Tommy—a bruiser and nothing else.

He scaled at 131 in fighting trim, which is pretty light for a lightweight in these

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days of fluctuating weights. But he was short, about five-one in height; broad-shouldered, bull-necked, heavily muscled; awkward, bow-legged, squint-eyed, freckle-faced, red-headed—and with a perpetual leer on his face. I have often thought that this leer of Tommy's meant many victories; it was ugly enough to whip a man with a yellow streak before the scrap started.

And believe me, that leer wasn't given the lie by his fighting methods. Do you remember the celebrated McGovern-Palmer scrap? That was Tommy all over. He never faced the ropes waiting for the gong; always the center of the ring.

The gong. He'd leap forward—more like a bullfrog than a panther, although there was something feline in his movements at that. Gloves would touch, then he'd step back to let the other chap get his guard up, and—a rush, a swirl of arms and slams; the impact of body on body; writhing, twisting, straining; smash, bang, biff! Then maybe blood—and always action!

Is it any wonder that I was enthusiastic? I tried Tommy out against a first-class scrapper. That bout is history now. It was slam-bang from bell to bell, and I saw right off that Tommy needed more training before he'd be ready for the real big ones. Yes, he received the newspaper decision in that fight, but it wasn't too satisfactory; you see, he hadn't learned to fight a man who could fight back when they were in close, and who had a cover like a turtle.

AFTER several months of training I matched Tommy with Dick Nelligan for a ten-round no-decision go at the Garden. Big guarantee and all that. Two days before the fight Tommy comes to me with his left eye closed, one tooth knocked out and his right hand broken.

"For the love of Mike," I gasped, "what have you been doing?"

He hung his head for all the world like a naughty boy.

"Nawthin'."

"Sure—*nothing!*" I came back sarcastically. "Nothing caused that doused glim and the busted hand and the broken tooth. Now, listen here——"

"Aw, say, Mr. Collins," he pleaded boyishly, "honest, could I stan' there an' see that big boob half break th' girl's arm——"

I saw light, and despite the seriousness of losing the forfeit money, I grinned.

"Oh-ho, a girl! What's her name?"

"Piney—P-E-O-N-Y," he spelled laboriously. "Piney Gillins."

"What does she do for a living?"

"Man—mani——" he flushed. "One of them wimmin what shine y'r fingernails."

"Manicure, eh? You seem to know her life-history. Tell me about it."

"Y'see," he explained, evidently glad to confide, "I'm walking in Central Park and I hears quarrelin' between a gent'man an' a lady. I don't pay no 'tention particular, but I comes on them an' I see he's got her by the arm.

" 'Leggo,' she says, 'you hurt!'

" 'No!' he answers.

"She winces an' says 'Ouch!' an' then I steps forward and asks her does she need some one to knock the block offen that guy. 'Fore she can answer he lights into me."

Tommy paused and smiled retrospectively.

"Well," he went on significantly, "after I knocked him out I takes her home—an' that's where the funny part comes in. Th' guy ain't no masher—he's her brother!"

"Good way to get in strong with the family," I commented.

"So I'm gonna call there——"

"What about Nelligan?"

"I'll fight him."

"You can't—not with that hand."

The fight was called off, and I went with Tommy to call on Miss Peony Gillins. Despite a bit of lip-paint and plenty of powder and suspiciously blond and abundant hirsute adornment, she looked like a substantial girl. It was about a month later, when Tommy was beginning to pick up in his training again, that he came to me and sheepishly asked for two hundred dollars extra.

"What for?"

"Hunk of ice."

I gave him the two hundred of his own money for the diamond, and the next day their engagement was announced.

A short time after that I tried Tommy out against a good second-rater and his hand stood the going elegantly. I challenged Nipper Riley and he surprised me by accepting. When Tommy knocked him cold in the fourth round, I knew I had a scrapper under my wing who was ready for a crack at the world's title—and all of New York rooting for him. Fight fans love a bruiser.

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MEANWHILE there was another fighter in the light-weight division who was exciting a world of favorable talk. Frank Forrest was his name, and it was significant of the man's personality that he had no nickname.

He was about five feet six in height; had taken two years at the high-school and knew a few words of Latin; wore a mop of curly brown hair and was handsome until it hurt.

He was a fighter, too; not the bruising, smashing scrapper of the Tommy Daley class, but a clean, phenomenally clever boxer of the MacFarland type. He'd forged to the front by an unbroken string of victories, in which very few knockouts figured, and he and Daley were recognized as the two men who stood in line for a crack at the champion.

Of course I guess you've already sized up what's coming. At some racket or benefit Forrest and Peony met. Two weeks later Tommy Daley came to me with his face distorted with hate.

"Listen," he rasped, "an' don't interrupt. Piney an' that dam' Forrest are settin' up to each other. She give me back my ring. Says I ain't eddicated enough. I t'rew it in th' sewer. I tol' her I was goin' to knock the face offen that highfalutin' lover she's got—in th' ring or on th' street, one. Now it's up to you. Match me, or there's goin' to be a dam' good fight put on in th' street th' first time him an' me meets."

He was gone.

I felt genuinely sorry for Tommy, and as the days went by I grew more sorry. He was really a pitiful object. Uneducated he was, true; but the love he had given the blond little manicure was man-love tinged with worship. He could not see the superficiality of her, nor the shallowness of her flip repartee. To him she was a goddess—a superior being.

Daley's work fell off; he was not himself. I sought him one night—found him sitting on his bed, head pillowed in his gnarled hand. And there were tear-traces on his cheeks. I patted him clumsily.

"Cut the soft stuff," I urged gently. "She ain't worth it——"

He was on his feet in an instant; his teeth clenched—fists balled.

"Shut up!" he rasped. "Don't you never say nothin' like that again—see! She's the best—the best——"

All of a sudden he turned around and walked out of the room.

LESS than two weeks later Tommy and Forrest were signed up. I had refused to let Tommy do more than enter the room for a sufficient length of time to scrawl his hen-track signature; but I noticed with surprise that Forrest seemed anxious for the fight. The purse was large, true; but——

"His type is easy for me," explained Forrest smilingly, showing his pure-white, even teeth. "I have an easy time with bruisers——" And from his record I knew that he did.

Once the articles of agreement were signed Daley immersed himself in his work. He trained almost too faithfully, so that I had to slacken him up for fear that he'd overdo it.

They weighed in at six o'clock the day of the fight. Forrest trembled the beam at 133, the scheduled weight. When Tommy hopped on the platform, the scales didn't quiver. Then I tried 'em out and saw that he tipped at 130—and he wasn't trained too fine at that.

The main go was scheduled to start at ten o'clock sharp. Tommy was nervous in his dressing-room, but nervous in an entirely different way from the regular run of fighters. He was dead crazy to get into the ring with Forrest; to shoot across the ring after him with both arms flailing; to batter the man who had calmly stolen the girl he loved.

Finally they entered the ring, shook hands perfunctorily, the introductions and usual preliminaries to a big fight were finished and the seconds scurried from the ring with the paraphernalia. Then, alone with the referee, they stood in their corners and awaited the gong. Only ten rounds it was to be—but I knew the temper of my man and realized that it couldn't go the route.

Have you ever seen a scrapper who's mediocre until he gets up against a first-class fighter and then becomes a wonder? That, in a way, was what occurred with Forrest that night. True, he was not mediocre, but he fought that night as he has never fought before or since.

As the gong sounded for the first round, the two men stepped forward lightly, eagerly. Across the outstretched hands of the referee their gloves touched lightly; Smiley

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stepped back and the fight had started.

I was in the ring there—mentally—and I clutched the edge of my chair and the cold sweat stood out all over me.

Tommy stepped back, slowly doubled himself into a vicious little ball and catapulted forward. And did Forrest break ground. He did—not! No, sir; instead of that he stepped in coolly. His right streaked upward and smashed against Tommy's jaw, straightening him up. Then Forrest's left slammed over and Tommy teetered on his heels.

So far so good. The crowd was on its feet yelling like a bunch of maniacs—but Forrest went too far. He stepped in close and tried infighting; something that no lightweight who ever lived could do with Tommy. Dazed as he was, he fought like a tiger, and for fully a half-minute there was an interchange of blows which was sickening—or delightful—according to the point of view.

Still the first round was Forrest's by a big margin, and I tried to drum a little caution into my man's head when he came to his corner at its end.

"You do your part an' I'll do mine," he snapped. "This is *one* fight I'm goin' to fight my own way—see?"

I saw. I saw him sidle to the center at the beginning of the second round and make a bull rush for Forrest as the taller man slipped easily from his corner. Once again Forrest made the mistake of trying to mix things, and first thing I knew he was breaking ground with the terror incarnate—the terror which was Tommy Daley—after him relentlessly; and as they thundered past me, Forrest fighting gamely and ineffectually, I heard Tommy cursing fiercely; short, sharp, bitter oaths—snapping them out with each impact of glove on flesh.

The round was all Daley. By the end of the three minutes of fighting there wasn't a sane man in the audience, and gore was running in streams down the clear flesh of the men in the ring. It looked like a sure victory for Tommy; but again the spectators figured without careful deliberation.

Battered as he was—for Forrest had fought gamely and his blows were snappy—Daley was fidgety during the minute's rest. As the gong clanged for the third round he shot from his corner like a kid thunderbolt and darted across the canvas flooring. But it was a different Forrest who met him; a man suddenly the superlatively clever boxer rather than the bruising fighter.

Tommy bored in close; Forrest merely worked his hands down along Tommy's arms and grinned. Daley tried to wrestle loose and slam for head or body despite the rule provision of clean breaks; but with the utmost ease Forrest frustrated his maddened efforts.

Daley backed away. Immediately Forrest stepped after him and spanked a vicious left jab on his nose. Enraged, my man came in again, and instead of breaking ground, Forrest stepped inside his guard and hooked a hard right to the jaw. Another clinch.

The men were fighting true to form now and the terrible scrapping of the first two rounds was shown to have been a flash in the pan. Before the end of the round Daley managed to get inside Forrest's guard and land a near haymaker on the solar plexus. It was almost "good night" right there, but Forrest weathered it until the gong. Still, Tommy had earned an even round.

The fourth was a repetition of the third, and the fifth of its two predecessors. But in the sixth the bulldog tactics of Tommy and his tirelessness started to have the proper effect. Forrest jabbed less confidently, and broke ground with less cause. At the end of the round he was bleeding profusely and wabbled to his corner. Tommy smiled grimly as he lay back in his chair and let his handler rub his legs and chest.

"Now's me time," he half snarled. "I've got that yeller cur where I want 'im now. You watch this next round——"

"Careful——" I started as the gong sounded; and he turned to me just long enough to snarl—

"Shut up!"

Forrest was game—I must say that much for him. But no man in his condition could have stood the human battering-ram which hurtled into him. Daley was a demon: right, left—a regular fusillade. Four times Forrest took the count, and on the fifth time he made an agonizing effort to rise; found himself without the requisite strength of leg, and at the fatal "ten" rolled over into oblivion, completely whipped.

And Tommy Daley was happy again, and just kid enough to talk to me about it.

"She t'rew me down and took up wit' him. Now—I've showed him up. I reckon she's sorry——"

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"You don't care for her any more," I ventured; for I knew her type.

"Don't I?" he said querulously, eying me peculiarly. "Maybe you don't know as much as you think you do."

WE HADN'T been in our little apartment five minutes the next morning before the phone tinkled. When I saw the grin on Tommy's face, I knew everything was all right.

"How's tricks?" I questioned lightly; sorry that the kid was making up with her, but glad because I knew he loved her and wanted her.

"Fine," he came back quickly—and he laughed brightly. "They're coming my way for fair now."

"And Peony?"

"She's comin' over—I offered to call there, but she says she phoned right from the corner drug-store and is comin' up. You c'n beat it."

I slipped into my bedroom after patting him on the shoulder. I didn't notice then that the transom was open. But it was, and I couldn't help hearing what happened.

I heard Peony enter; and then—

"Piney!"

"Oh! Tommy—you *darling!*"

And then I heard her rush across the floor, and I knew that he must have her tight in his arms. Then I heard the sound of a kiss—and then—a sudden little startled cry in Peony's voice.

"What——"

"Listen!" It was Tommy talking now; a new Tommy—his voice commanding, superior, prideful. "Listen, Piney. You was engaged to me an' you turned me down f'r that boob Forrest. I knocked —— outa' Forrest last night. You made y'r choice—now stick to it! I'm done wit' you!"

"Tommy," she gasped.

"Cut it, Piney. I sized you up to a 'T.' All I wanted to win f'r was to make you come back to me—an' then to give you th' mitt. I know what y'are now—an' it don't hurt me to lose you. Ta-ta, Piney. Beat it!"

And Piney beat it!

As I remarked previously, the tendency toward the unexpected is the most fascinating characteristic of the average person. Yet who would have suspected the Bruiser of it?

OLD DOG REX

by EDWARD L. CARSON

I KNOW he is only a husky and ready to snarl or to snap;
(That eye was put out by a quill-pig and he lost that left ear in a scrap,)
And at times there have been some fierce battles when me and him didn't agree,
But while he stacks up some disfigured, he sure looks real pretty to me.

Of course you have never been snowblind, but maybe you've heard people tell
That folks it has fixed good and plenty have lost all their horror of hell;
For talk about nerve all you want to, you'll find it just curls up and dies
When a man's lost all sense of direction along with the sight of both eyes.

It hit me once up on the Yukon and left me as blind as a bat,
Some twenty miles out from the station and tired as blazes at that;
The other three dogs slipped their harness and mixed up a hike right away,
But Old Rex, he wasn't a quitter, he somehow elected to stay.

For hours and hours he dragged me as I lay like a log on the sled,
And he got me at last to the depot with both of us pretty near dead;
It was good work for three dogs to do it, but Old Rex he done it alone,
Skin deep is the limit of beauty but loyalty goes to the bone.

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The Adventurers

A Four Part Story—Conclusion

By Arthur A. Nelson

SYNOPSIS—A South African big-game hunter and gentleman adventurer, *Alan Severn*, receives from *Norma Raylescroft* a tiny diamond-studded miniature as a reward for saving her life in Johannesburg. From England comes *Miss Buckerton*, a Kentucky girl, to visit the *Raylescrofts*, and also *"Sherry" Severn, Alan's* cousin, who has fallen in love with her.

Alan rushes *Sherry* off on a lion hunt, during which *René Duval*, a friend, is killed. Upon their return a cablegram to France notifies *De Roquemont, René's* cousin, of the death.

Frequent visits to the *Raylescroft* home bring *Alan* suddenly to his senses. *Mr. Raylescroft*, the father, will have no penniless adventurer for a son-in-law. He prefers the polished *Lord Chalmes*. *Miss Raylescroft*, the daughter, tells *Alan* she will welcome him as a friend, but not as a lover. She, too, seems to favor *Chalmes*.

Alan determines to leave the Rand. The opportunity comes in the shape of the Hon. Cecil Rhodes, who buys the hitherto profitless Severn mine and then discloses to the two men his colossal dream of Empire. He proposes that they investigate, for him, a certain part of the little-known depths of Central Africa, coveted by Belgium; and that with them they take *Ingulf, Alan's* servant, a descendant of the Vikings, and also old *Dr. Ivarsson*, archeologist, seeker for the hidden city located by *Ibrahim's* map, and described by an ancient Norse saga.

Far up-country they join, for protection, a force led by *De Roquemont*, secret agent of Belgium, Britain's rival in Africa. Near the Zambezi they defeat a band of natives, rescuing a captive party made up of *Lord Chalmes, Norma Raylescroft, Miss Buckerton* and *Mrs. Rountree*, an American widow. *Alan* is forced by circumstance to take them along. Together they plunge northward toward the equator.

In the heart of Africa, hidden by towering mountains and protected from the world for ages, they come upon the lost Viking race and its great stone city, Valkyria. *King Fagu*, mead-sodden and profligate, orders the strangers royally entertained, yet held prisoners, for he has seen *Norma* and desires her. In *Prince Hakon*, the King's nephew, and his half-sister, the beautifully savage *Lady Phaïma*, the Adventurers find friends. The Viking Princess defies both the King and the Black Priesthood when they seek to harm the newcomers. And it is she who shields *Norma* from the Red King.

CHAPTER XIX

THE JOTUNS' TREASURE

HOURS, in all our great adventures in the world, race into our lives and out like swirling dead leaves of time, blown away and forgotten. As I sat up with a start, the hot African sun was shining full in my face from the tall, narrow windows of that room; and Sherry was standing over my couch, fully dressed and booted, and with a pair of big revolvers as usual strapped around his waist.

"Get up, old fellow," he adjured. "The prince is waiting in the anteroom, you know, with the ladies, he has promised to show them a rare sight—a sort of Bluebeard's Chamber, from what I gather, with all the loot those old sea-rovers picked up, hundreds of years ago, in their voyage down the Mediterranean, and their raids on the

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Roman provinces in Africa. By Jove! Alan, it will be a sight no Englishman has ever seen before!"

"'Ware goblin gold, my lad!" I put in sceptically, pulling on my boots in a brown study. "Never leap a blind fence in the dark. And now tell me, why does Prince Hakon tempt a hungry pack of foreign wolves like us with the Jotuns' hoard of his ancestors?"

He laughed significantly.

"Some fine day, Alan, hell will break loose in Valkyria! Already the people murmur at the Red King's cruelty. The prince has his own motives, I fancy. He is the popular idol—half the army would follow him, if he turns crusty on his respected uncle—and small blame to him. My blood boils at that devil's work. I have seen women that were broken by the lash, and twisted things that once were men, crawling in the streets. For my part, I say let us cast in our lot with the prince. He is a gallant gentleman if ever I saw one."

"And shrewd enough to know that white men and yellow men fight for gold," I remarked cynically. "Sovereigns to shillings, we get what Englishmen gave to the 'King of Norroway'—six feet of alien soil. Well, as these Arabs say, 'Kismet! What is written is written!' As for the prince, I am his man—gold or no gold. And now for Bluebeard's Chamber."

And having breakfasted perfunctorily during this mad conversation, we sauntered with the doctor into the anteroom where the prince was waiting for us with De Roquemort and my Lord Chalmes—the latter, as usual, lazily bantering with the women in a clique apart.

Hakon watched us with a shadowy smile.

"Ha, my lords!" he said. "So you come too? Gold is a most mighty magnet in all lands, it seems! By the bones of the dead, you shall have it, my noble friends! Aye, you shall open the Jotuns' treasury and behold the ransom of kings—the loot their keen blades and grim hands tore from the great temples and plundered cities of the past . . . It lies here under your feet as it has lain for twenty generations—useless to your world but waiting for bold hearts to win it back . . . to win it and rescatter it once again!"

"All very pretty, Prince," I broke in. "But how are we going to get it—if you don't mind?"

"Earn it!" was the laconic reply. He stirred his sword so that the steel clanged faintly upon the marble bench where he had lounged. "You have guessed the way. What say you, Jarls, will you strike home with me at last?"

The Marquis threw in suddenly—

"His Imperial Highness will revolt and seize the throne." He added in a swift aside, "I will answer for these gentlemen, my Lord Prince. You shall be master of the palace in a day . . . And for the rest——"

"And King Fagu the Red?" I asked curiously.

"The Butcher has lived long enough," Prince Hakon said, cold as an icicle. "One boon he shall have—to die fighting, but by another hand than mine. He is my uncle." He paused and pointed to Ingulf and a strange smile swept over his face. "That is the man to fight him."

"He is the man, Prince," I said quietly. "But a word of advice. Make no mistake and let the Red King slip through your fingers, or you will never sit on the throne of your fathers. And now—in case of accidents, you know—the treasure? The hunter must pay the hounds, my lord."

WE WALKED in silence down the room to where the women were jesting gaily with his handsome half-sister, all unwitting the grim compact just made; and listening amused to one of Chalmes' unique drawing-room catastrophes in his lordship's best Piccadilly drawl. He had played "back" for Raoul de Roquemort, and as I looked at their gay, unconscious faces, I wondered if any of them would ever see civilization again, if our plans miscarried by a hair.

"Be it how you will," Hakon said. "But let us be swift about it, Jarls. Come with me."

I nodded stiffly.

He beckoned and passed out. We all followed in his wake, De Roquemort first, down the quiet corridors and through a seemingly endless labyrinth of gloomy passages and empty courts. The palace seemed asleep.

Presently the ladies uttered exclamations of dismay. We had come into some disused wing of the great main keep, crumbling into semi-decay; where the dust lay thick upon the gray, ancient stone walls and broken,

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somber stairways that were taking us evidently to the lower level of the streets.

As the light faded out I felt a woman's hand slip tensely under my arm—it was Norma. She had left Lord Chalmes to himself; and we went on tacitly together without speaking, following the tall shape of Prince Hakon, who had turned into another vaulted passage and pulled up at last at a grim, yawning archway that ended in a flight of stone steps, leading downward into a black mystery below.

"Light your lamp, Jarl," he said briefly to De Roquemort, and suddenly the gasoline torch flared up in the gloom and revealed the steps plainly.

"'Ware steps!" I warned Alline, who had arrived breathless. "Steady, my lady!"

The American girl laughed hysterically.

"I'm all agog," she said, "to see what is in Bluebeard's room! But I admit I'm afraid to look."

The marquis was gallantly assisting the handsome Yankee widow down the steps. The doctor followed, looking like some prehistoric ape-man in the distorted light. Alline tried to laugh—

"It's the 'curse of curiosity,' Mr. Severn, that makes people discover things!"

There was a wry smile on his lordship's features as Norma, supported by my arm thrown around her waist, went pluckily down the stone stair, leaving him to follow disconsolately with his torch, like an unwilling lamp-bearer to that curious pageant of mystery, avarice and love. Ingulf came last, and glancing back again, I saw the light flash from the great, naked sword in his hand.

Presently we had reached the foot of the stair. We were in a vaulted, dim passageway underground and cut transversely by two narrow openings leading to right and left.

"We are under the palace, my lords," said Hakon. His voice sounded sepulchral. "One of those cuttings leads out to the river embankment; the other comes out into the central courtyard near the wall."

The passage went straight ahead for something like fifty feet, and ended in a great, grim-looking iron door, set flush into the solid gray wall of stone.

"The key, my Lord Prince!" De Roquemort said with a catch in his voice. "The key of that door?"

"Aye, hold the light closer, Jarl!"

In a minute I heard the iron bar grate back in its rusty socket. I saw the heavy door swing outward, as Hakon heaved on the huge iron handle; and we crowded inside.

WE STOOD in what was evidently a stone mausoleum eighteen or twenty feet square. In several iron sockets on the wall were jammed partially burned torches of some resinous yellow wood which flared up brightly when we had set them alight to get a better view. Then we stared amazed at what we saw.

"The devil!" Sherry gasped out. "It is Bluebeard himself!"

He pointed to the still figure of a man in rusty armor, seated in a sort of stone armchair, with the weird face and empty eye-sockets staring straight at us. The women screamed and recoiled at the sight, but Prince Hakon never stirred.

Then I saw that the man was dead—a mummy; and went up to him.

In life he must have been a very tall man, well above seven feet; and even death had not quite deprived him of a certain dark dignity and commanding, martial air that sat upon his dead brows. He was clad in rusted and tarnished steel harness with a winged helm on his head like the pictures of the old Viking gods; and across the knees of the silent, mailed form there lay a long, straight sword, whose double edges, once bright and keen, had long ago been eaten away and dulled by the corroding film of rust.

The face was that of a man of sixty or past, with iron-gray hair and a long, drooping gray mustache; but its chief characteristic was the remarkably heavy jaw—it was the jaw of a Roman general or a born fighter. Whoever had set that dead man there had known something of that lost art of the Egyptians, for the mummy was still in a fair state of preservation and over it hung the faint, unmistakable odor of bitumen. The figure in the narrow stone chair faced toward the door—it was propped up by the back and arms of the chair; and the illusion was startlingly real, for one yellow, claw-like hand had fallen as if menacingly on the cross-hilt of the rusty sword.

The old scientist pulled himself together first. He was blinking appallingly at the gray wall behind the stone seat, where I could see cut into the rock as if by some

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sharp-pointed instrument a number of wavering lines of queer writing which I could not make out.

"Runes! By the sword of Odin!" he squeaked. "As I live, it is the Saga of Ingulf!" And he actually began to read aloud slowly from the writing on that hoar-stained wall, as easily as you may read this printed page . . . "Hark to the dead man's Saga!" he said. "This is the Viking's death-song:

"Nor holm nor hearth nor land
Fell to my empty hand—
Naught save this rusty brand;
Sea-thief and wanderer:
Homeless and landless I
Saw the wild surf boil high
As the gray coast we scanned
Long days without measure,
Nor Death reck nor rue.
Ingulf the Tall hight I,
Ingulf the black-haired Skald
Pirate and Bareserk called;
Ingulf the King I died
Here in this chamber.
Ingulf his name must be
Who wins this treasure:
DEAD MEN SAY TRUE."

I stared at the features of the dead sea-rover, and at the impenetrable mask of Ingulf, who stood gazing into his dead face like one who had lost the power of speech; and it seemed to me that I could see a shadowy, far-off, yet familiar likeness between the two. Was Ingulf his living reincarnation? My brain staggered with the appalling puzzle of it all.

Speechlessly, as if he saw some ghost of his own past rise up mockingly from behind a wall of lost memories, Ingulf stood peering fascinated at the mailed figure that seemed to watch him silently from its inscrutable, empty eyes. Great drops of sweat broke out on his forehead. He passed one hand with a gesture of dull anguish over his face.

As if rooted to the floor, I stared at him, wordless. Over and over the question was mechanically repeating itself in my brain: was he the dead Viking's lineal descendant? The doctor was gabbling off jerkily something about his abominably futile Runes. He seemed to regard them as of enormous importance; they were his odd, warped, crazy little graven gods.

I didn't care a farthing dip about them. I was mentally groping out of the dark . . . *Was Ingulf the rightful King of Valkyria?* Then Cecil Rhodes' dream of destiny would turn real! Like a mist of yellow flame, the torchlight flared up suddenly and illumined the whole strange scene; and through it I had a momentary flash of Norma's pale face, with her eyes set in it like jewels; and a vision of the doors of the House of Raylescroft—opening slowly—at last.

BUT if it was true after all, why was Ingulf so silent? Why had Phaïma and Hakon and the Red King and all the rest of them utterly failed to recognize him? Or was that whole dark skein of tangled lives only some mad, weird web of chance, a wild conjecture—the mere coincidence of a name? Out of the queer silence that had fallen over us all like a spell, I heard an amazed voice choked up as if cracked saying disconnectedly—

"The treasure!"

"The treasure!" echoed De Roquemort. "Where is the treasure?" His jaw dropped as he stared round the room. "Death of my life, *camarades!*" he roared. "The room is empty!"

It was the truth. Save for ourselves and the mummy in the stone seat, and a pile of unburned fagots in a corner, there was nothing else.

"Open the iron door, Jarls, in the wall!" said Hakon.

And then I perceived what none of us had noticed at first, a narrow iron door set in level with the masonry of the wall behind the dead man. The damp and rust of centuries had corroded the iron till it had turned to almost the color of the stone, on which account we had overlooked it. The door was not locked. It opened into a kind of oblong alcove, about fifteen feet long and ten feet across.

I could make out the dull sheen and flash of jeweled armor hung on the wall, and golden ornaments of every description, and long rows of metal bars piled up almost to the roof. They were stacked like stove-wood against the gray rock. To describe what was in that room would read like an inventory of the contents of some marvelous treasure-chamber in one of the great metropolitan museums of the world's capitals; or perhaps of some equally priceless collection in the palace of a multi-millionaire.

First of all there were four great golden basins, that must have weighed twenty or thirty pounds apiece; and they might have

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come out of some royal palace of the Cæsars for all that I know. One of them was beautifully and quaintly carved with the relief of a banquet scene in a noble hall—apparently a king's palace; but we forgot the beauty of the designs when we looked into the basins.

Inside were dozens of ancient gold cups literally crusted with gems that flashed and glittered as we shook the dust from them, one by one, and held them up to the light. Some of them bore inscriptions which the doctor pronounced to be Phœnician; others were inscribed in Arabic, and several in Latin. Besides the goblets there were dozens of gem-crusted daggers and jeweled collars, set with great sapphires and rubies, and with hundreds of small diamonds—hardly any stones that were under a karat—and a good many that would weigh four or five karats or over, all of the first water.

There were a few suits of beautiful steel and brass armor all inlaid with gold; and five or six separate steel cuirasses of the finest workmanship, which once might have glittered upon the stalwart centurions of Heraclian, when the Roman legionaries had come sweeping down in their long, brave, emotionless line in the African sun on the queenly cities of the blue midland sea, all in the long ago. Neither the Carthaginians nor the Romans would ever arise again to claim them from their Viking plunderers who were also dead and forgotten.

FLUNG carelessly on the top of all that incredible heap of loot were half a dozen linked sword-belts, in which jewels flashed, and scores of massive gold armlets and anklets; two great altar-cloths that shone with a snaky brilliance wherever the light struck their heavy folds. They were made of pure hammered gold, cunningly woven with flat links joined together almost as perfectly as the fabric of a cloth.

Then we came to the metal bars piled up in rows. There were at a rough estimate about three hundred and fifty ingots that weighed anywhere from eight up to fifteen pounds each; but whether they had been mined in the country or represented the melted loot of some sacked city of the old world it was impossible to know.

Nobody cared a particle. They were there, before our eyes—more than a ton of gold! And the value of them, with the jewels, was literally staggering. How many millions lay heaped up in that room I didn't know then. I was dazed. I knew that we had found an enormous treasure—one of the world's great treasures. Drake nor Morgan, who had sacked the golden cities of the Spanish Main, had never gained such a treasure at one blow.

Cortez and the old Conquistadores of Spain had left a red blot in history for such another. And even the dark heart of Africa had never given up anything like it. If we could get it through to the coast! Somebody began to quote monotonously:

> "Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!
> Bright and yellow, hard and cold,
> Molten, graven, hammered and rolled;
> Price of many a crime untold:
> Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!"

"We are all millionaires!" muttered the voice of De Roquemort. "We have got the hoard of the Jotuns!"

"My lords, we will need to prove that with cold steel," Prince Hakon put in dryly. "Come, we are losing time."

He passed out abruptly, with the Marquis at his heels. Ingulf glided out after them.

Their footsteps receded along the passage. The others were going away, but I stood quite still. Norma clung fast to my arm. Lord Chalmes watched us absently. He coughed. The ex-professor, lingering absorbed, uttered an exclamation and held up a beautiful and ancient bronze urn apparently of Phœnician workmanship, from which he poured forth a golden stream of rings and brooches that sparkled with jewels.

"Look!" droned the doctor. "The old story—the wares of Tyre and Sidon—symbols of human nature. Always the same! I wonder what fair hands and white throats those costly playthings once shone upon in the Golden Age?"

As he poured them out in his hand, a great ruby that glowed like a red star leaped from that gleaming flood and came spinning across the floor.

Strangely enough it spun to Norma's feet like an omen. I had an overpowering impulse and I read the same thought in her eyes. I picked up the ring mechanically and slipped it upon her slim white finger, astounded to find that it fitted perfectly.

The doctor's wrinkled face seemed to

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crack open suddenly. He had smiled. He gave us a piercing, long look out of his faded, wise old eyes, peering over the enormous steel-rimmed spectacles. Then he went away, nodding, nodding his big gray head.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH LORD CHALMES PASSES OUT

NORMA caught her breath swiftly, looking down fascinated at the gleaming stone on her finger.

"Why, Alan, it is my birthstone!" she said breathlessly. "What have you done?"

And stung by his lordship's ironic eyes, I pointed to the glittering heap of treasure.

"I have found a way to climb to the star as I said that I would—one day! Look, there is the golden ladder, Norma!"

But her eyes remained fixed, as if hypnotized, upon the great, blazing ruby. She seemed chained there without the power of words. A vague, misty smile was breaking slowly over her face.

I was alarmed by the idea that she was going to cry. So wonderful a thing is a woman's final surrender. For I had guessed that almost instinctively. I said, very low:

"It is your betrothal ring, remember! Wear it for a luckstone till we both——"

Lord Chalmes started as if he had been shot. He had understood, and through his ashen-gray lips he burst out chillingly:

"Severn, you're a —— adventurer! I had expected this; it won't succeed. This lady is my affianced wife. An arrangement, of course, and with her father's sanction. Keep back—or as I live, I'll knock you down!"

"Mark me, my Lord," I said to that, with my face just an inch from his chin, "she's going to throw you over and marry me."

He looked at me incredulously, and shot a sharp stare at Norma's telltale features. That seemed to stagger him. The broad yellow bar of light from the flickering oil lamp which he had held closer flamed across their faces. Norma's was white and startled; and as if in reply to an audible question, she made with her head the mute gesture of assent.

Norma did not speak. It was all like a pantomime in a play. The weird surroundings made up the stage-setting—the medieval room, the dead pirate in his rusty mail, and the heaps of gold.

He stepped back gravely. I watched his somber, pale face with a sort of strained fascination; and saw it abruptly change, from mocking irony to a look that was a total blank—the queer, stunned look which creeps over a man's face who has renounced something out of his life, folded back the page and put away the Book of Dreams at last upon some dusty shelf.

Long afterward that singular look upon his white, stunned face remained seared into my memory.

To me, in Valkyria and afterward, Lord Chalmes was always a superior sort of personage—a very Richard Cœur de Lion of a man, a heroic figure, a thoroughbred, an aristocrat of the "upper crust." And I can still remember my amazement at his wordless exit. He never looked back. He walked away inscrutably, without a word; recalling I think that he was a peer and a gentleman and true to his invincible code. I heard his footfalls going away along the corridor, as if they were passing out of our lives. We were alone.

NORMA came straight into my arms.

"He is gone, and I have given him up at last, Alan!" she said a minute after, looking back. "Once I used to try to make myself believe that I really loved him; but it was all a mistake—a terrible mistake! It was only the empty glitter of a peerage—to be called 'My Lady!' I knew it was a dreadful mistake, on the day I heard that you had gone away in the pay of Cecil Rhodes. And I followed you to Rhodesia, hoping that we might meet again——"

"At the parting of the ways! Thank God!" I said and crushed her close in my arms. Breathlessly she broke away and looked at me panic-stricken.

"Alan! They have all gone back without us. We shall miss them! Take me away. I am afraid of this place."

But I laughed and kissed her.

"They will be waiting for us at the stair," I said.

Norma shuddered.

"I am afraid," she quivered. "I can not bear the empty eyes of that dead Thing, they frighten me! I was sure a moment ago that I heard something creeping, creeping, always nearer. Take me back, I am afraid!"

Passing behind the figure in the big stone

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chair, I stooped, wrenching one of the blazing fagots from its iron socket on the wall.

They had all burned low—the room seemed to sway and blur, very oddly; to become weirdly dim and stifling, with the hot gust of men's breath, and to be full of long, quiet, flitting shadows like vague illusions of the unreal shapes and effigies of men. I started. Was it all illusion?

"Be swift!" a voice behind me hissed. "The girl——"

I was pinned fast, before I could wheel around in my tracks. Hands like steel clamps gripped my arms before I could so much as wink an eyelid. It was all horribly quick, like a stage trick of acrobatics.

The same voice said grimly:

"Be silent, Jarl! A cry and I drive the steel home!"

I could see nobody at all; but I was aware of the presence of something that breathed very hard from behind me. I felt a dagger prick the back of my neck.

The lights at last flared up brilliantly all around me. And craning my head back with a convulsive, reckless, hard wrench like a mad animal in a trap, I discovered that I was looking up into the triumphant eyes of the King of Valkyria.

I stared around at the ring of fierce faces. I saw Agi the archer, and Azir the tall guardsman; I saw the dark, evil features and wicked green orbs of the Arch Priest; and many another grim face I knew. But the King's chilling eyes, with a flash of comprehension traveled past me to Norma, who stood with a stare of horror frozen on her face.

The Red King took his dagger from my throat.

"Take away his weapons," he commanded, pointing to my revolvers; and they took them away.

"AND now, my fair Lady Norma," said the Red King, "you will bend to my will at last, for all your proud heart, or this man who is your lover dies!"

He fixed his eyes on me—eyes that seemed to glow like points of fire—and a shadow came into his face.

"Listen, my Lady," he said slowly, "one little word from you will send his soul winging to the gates of Hela! Tonight he lives and breathes—tomorrow the greensward may close over him forever! Under the ground with the night winds singing across his grave, who will remember that he was once a man?

"And yet, O Lady, because you have loved this man, I would see him spared if it may be so. Myself, I do not condemn the Jarl who stands there, your confessed lover, nor doom a brave man who has but followed the star of Fate which the gods have set aglow. You are his judge. O Lady, be merciful or be heartless; sentence him, or set him free! He lives or dies, as you will it—but you shall be a Queen—Queen of Valkyria!"

He paused and seemed to listen intently as if for some expected signal; but before Norma could speak he made a swift, imperious gesture.

"Wait," he said, "before you choose. There is a better reason, Lady, why you should be Queen."

With an altered face he had drawn himself up royally; and at that moment at least he looked to be every inch King.

"From Valhalla," he said quietly, "the gods call to me through your voice. Perhaps I have been a drunkard and a reveler—but never a dullard nor a coward. As you see this fair city of Valkyria, so I and mine have made it; as you see me, the King, so the gods have willed it. Men have called me 'the Butcher,' but only by a hand of iron is it possible to hold a throne without an heir. I have been childless. So the Alruna foretold ere she died. Had it been different, my Lady, I had been King indeed! But no son of mine has ever brought a smile of joy to my lips," he went on rather sadly. "And for me the bells that peal out so gladly for a gallant heir have never rung."

He was silent for a long minute. Amazed and spellbound I listened, watching the dawning struggle that was breaking over Norma's vivid face, from which the color had died out, leaving it dead-white and quivering, as if torn with conflicting thoughts.

"But always," he went on in a changed voice, "was graven in my memory the Alruna's saying: 'Only by mating with a Queen of an alien race shall the spell be broken and the Fates unchained!' And then you came, and I understood. There is no other way, Lady Norma, and I love you! Waking or dreaming, your face haunts me, and I hear the golden echoes of your voice! Aye, with you on my regenerated throne, life shall begin anew for me. I will cast off the poor

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husks and shreds of that old, ignoble life of mine and rule this fair land like a king—in truth, methinks almost like a god!"

Norma shrank back terrified.

"Give me time!" she gasped out trembling. "Give me time, O King! I can not answer you so soon—wait!"

"Nay, it must be now!" the King broke in coldly, and again he paused and seemed to listen intently for something. "Lady, it must be, and this man's life stands in my way. Tempt me no more; I am but a man, although I be King!"

Norma turned on me a quivering, tortured look. I burst out—

"I am ready to die——"

"I am sorry for you, Lady," said the King. "But for the peace of the after years, two masters none may serve, not even in memory! Remember that all men's eyes are turned upon a Queen, and drops of poison are ever on telltale tongues. The breath of slander——"

"How dare you, sir!" she said indignantly.

He checked himself instantly at the vision of her pale, contemptuous face and flashing eyes.

"I dare," he said slowly, "because I am King. Had I cared but to find a new mistress, I had followed my old wont and slain the man first, then consoled the lady afterward. Be wise, my Lady! Renounce him now and I can be generous; cleave to him, and his death is in it! Choose!"

But shuddering, Norma gasped—

"Alan, I can not——"

She had turned pale as death, and the tears were shining in her eyes. Watching her face, the King made a swift sign to the guards. I went suddenly rigid all over.

AS THEY stepped back, lacking the space to swing a sword, there was a long shriek from Norma that rang through the room and went echoing up the corridor. But no answering voice came back; only the echoes of that scream, that rose and died away. What had happened? Had they all gone away without us? Had we never been *missed?* Suddenly my blood ran cold. And for a hideous moment I nearly lost my grip on myself.

But amazingly enough I laughed, and its grim unexpectedness produced a singular effect on the King and all his wondering henchmen; it impressed and startled them. I read instinctively in their staring faces the uneasy premonition of peril—some ghost of fear. My wits were working swiftly. In another instant, I comprehended what it was they feared.

"King, the game is played out!" I said grimly. "That cry before a minute is past will bring down on you such a hell-blast of death as that priestly cur of yours there can tell you best," and I saw the priest quail and blanch as I said it.

"I have heard that the King of Valkyria was a brave and able soldier, but I have never heard that he was a fool. Draw off your men, Lord King, but be quick, if you would be gone alive! Let the girl go; I will do what I can to check the storm, ere it breaks!"

He started, and I saw fear creep into his eyes. I watched him, and hope leaped up in my heart.

"Hush! Be brave!" I said to Norma swiftly. "Help is near enough. Raoul de Roquemort will come back——"

"You are mad, Jarl!" quoth the King, divining in my face and in Norma's swift, involuntary glance toward the door the meaning of my words; while he stayed the guards with a rapid gesture. "No help will ever come from your friends. Hark!"

As the words left his lips a distant fusillade of revolver shots rang out like an echo from far up the passage at the stair—followed instantly by a hollow yell of triumph that burst from many voices, and then by a continuous roll of firing—broken by the faint, shivering clash of steel.

The effect of these sounds upon the men in the room was almost galvanic. Their grim features lit up with a fierce joy, and a dozen swords leaped out.

Over the swarthy face of Azir the soldier flashed a wolfish smile of triumph as he listened.

"The trap is sprung, King!" grated the guardsman, striding swiftly to the door and back while the Red King never stirred. "We have them! By the gods in Valhalla, they are ours! Swift! Sir King, slay this foreign wolf and take the girl now by force—the rest are caught 'twixt both ends of the trap, even as thou hadst expected. Aye, let our gallant comrades drive them back here on our blades to die!"

As if in a lightning glare of revelation I read the truth in their faces. I saw revealed in its nakedness of evil that deadly snare

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conceived and carried out by the master brain of the King who would regenerate his throne! The Red King had struck to save his kingdom, and struck home. What a captain the man was, after all! He had brilliantly thrown his guards upon us from both directions, confident that he would crush us between the wheels. Would he win?

The question flashed into my brain, but hopelessly, for I was looking death in the eyes. I saw the guardsman spin around and draw his sword, while he waited for the King's nod, ere he struck. I saw the frightful struggle of indecision that was mirrored in every detail upon Norma's tortured, quivering face—saw the Red King watching her intently from his eyes that glowed like two live coals of fire. I saw all that distinctly and all in an instant of time.

"Choose!" the King echoed, "which shall it be, the Queen—or the King's mistress?"

As he spoke another roll of firing came down the corridor, and with an almost superhuman access of strength and vigor I wrenched myself free from the hands that held me and struck him a fearful blow in the face.

"You hound!" I grated and struck once more.

He went staggering back, but the sheer bulk of the man kept him afoot. His face was convulsed with fury, and an angry white blotch showed livid upon the dark florid skin, as the guards dragged me down.

The King pointed at me.

"Kill him!"

"Oh, no, no! Let him go free!" Norma burst out appealingly, turning pale at the flash of the bare steel. "Release him! And —I will wed you, O King!"

THE words came too late. The sword of Azir had swung up. I was hemmed in at last and powerless, and I watched the glittering blade flash through the air—and fall aimlessly from his nerveless hand.

There was a shot from the door. My would-be murderer spun right-about-face, reeled, and coughed a crimson clot of blood from his lungs while he pointed a shaking finger at a figure that stood in the threshold. Suddenly he collapsed in his tracks.

"De Roquemort!" I tried to gasp. There was a blinding haze over my eyes. But the man in the door was not Raoul de Roquemort, but one I little expected to make that heroic sacrifice for me. Lord Chalmes came in the room coolly, almost lazily; he had evidently heard all that passed. But his face was hard-set as a marble god's. He didn't speak. He began firing with frightful, paralyzing precision into a room where men reeled and staggered and struck blindly at that shadowy avenging figure through a choking canopy of acrid, swirling smoke.

I groped for the sword of Azir and found it in a pool of warm blood and my hand touched a face on the floor. It was Norma's face. She had fainted, mercifully enough, across the stiffening corpse of the soldier.

I arose and laid about me furiously with the sword. It was a heavy weapon and I was exceedingly clumsy in its use. Faces staggered past me in the smoke and I struck at them with a mad lust of battle surging up through the thin veneer of all my civilized ancestors of a thousand years. I would hold that one spot against them all—and I did it. The firing in the room ceased. I felt a stream of blood trickling down my arm and began to wonder.

The smoke cleared away. My senses seemed to reel, as I stared absently at the sight that was unfolded. *The Red King was gone!* In that room three men were left on their feet, the others were dead or had broken out of the death-trap.

I was one and Lord Chalmes was one, but he stood reeling from side to side, very slowly, while the blood dripped from both his sleeves, down in red gussets to the floor. He seemed to be a gory mass of wounds. His pistols were empty and useless.

The third man was the Black Priest. He was unhurt, and I saw him leap at Lord Chalmes like a tiger, with a long sword in his hand, and strike. But as he sprang, with a last, wavering effort—for I was strangely weak and dizzy—I hurled the heavy sword at him, hilt first.

Dimly, as in a dream of some ghastly nightmare, I saw it strike him between the shoulder-blades and divert his arm as he cut fiercely at Chalmes. But the blow fell glancing on the peer's defenseless head and he dropped like a log, and lay very white and still.

My brain was whirling round madly. I saw Lord Chalmes falling and the thought came to me sadly enough:

"There fell a gallant gentleman of England!"

I saw the Arch Priest turn and glide

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through the door, and heard a clatter of footsteps, a volley of oaths in homely, familiar Anglo-Saxon; saw vaguely a group of faces, but whether of friends or foes or phantoms, I did not know. Then everything turned black.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST CHARGE OF THE GUARDS

I AWOKE, and the first face that I can remember seeing was Norma's, bending over me with her wonderful smile like the light breaking on a rippled pool. I gazed back a little vaguely into her eyes. The glow of the sunset was shining through the tall, embrasured window above me upon her face; very much as I had seen it shining upon her face before, but it seemed years before, and in a place I had almost forgotten: in the House of Raylescroft—the big gray house on the hill.

I sat up with a queer weakness and felt of the bandages on my head and arms. I was in a room I recognized at last; a white, high-ceilinged room with a glittering, beautiful marble arch. It was the main anteroom of Prince Hakon's royal suite in Valkyria. Suddenly it all came back to me with a rush: the acrid, choking powder-smoke in the Jotuns' treasure-chamber; the ring of menacing faces; the staggering, frantic figures of the Red King's guards; and through the gray pall of drifting smoke, that terrible white face of Lord Chalmes, so brave among so many! And again I could see him falling and the Arch Priest gliding out of the door like a great snake; then another crowd of faces seen through a whirling haze, and then blackness—and silence!

I looked past Norma's shoulder and saw a scared knot of women huddled at the window; the figures of Alline and Mrs. Rountree, and the Princess Phaïma with several of her women-in-waiting. They were all staring down out of the open window, and the sight they saw below seemed to terrify them greatly.

A woman's voice screamed in the room. Then suddenly a frenzied roar of triumph floated up from the great courtyard of the palace. It was cut short by a single sharp roll of gunfire. Then silence, a dead silence—the awed hush of expectancy. I wrenched myself up from the couch where I lay and staggered to the window.

A grim drama was being played out below.

It was, I realized instantly, the revolution that was going to topple the "Lion of Valkyria" down from his throne; but I had no part in it. Raoul de Roquemort was there, I marked, at the head of his wild company of Islam, with the sunlight glittering on his long bright blade and his face illumined by the fighting smile I knew. And Prince Hakon with him, clad in complete mail; and Ingulf too, in mail, with a shining, winged helm of steel, and his fatal claymore—a foot longer than any there. And Sherry and old Eric Ivarsson, the one-time professor of Oxford; as keen and bold as any Berserker in the Sagas he used to read; and El Zanek the ex-slaver, with his scarred, yellow face ablaze with a dark joy; and swarthy Señor Torres, the Portuguese, coolly training the lean black muzzles of the machine-guns on the palace steps.

Half a dozen of the King's gay-liveried archers lay sprawled in death across the marble steps, their life-blood welling out upon the white flagstones in a dark crimson stream. In the act of loosing the keen three-foot shafts from their long-bows, a deadly volley from the Martini-Henrys had stricken them down; but behind them through the big arched doors of the palace was pouring a wave of steel-clad soldiers.

They were going to charge—utterly reckless of their lives but utterly confident of the result—while down below in the courtyard a huddled group of unarmed and helpless slaves cowered in abject terror by the fountains, watching this scene with their rolling eyes.

I swept my glance around in vain for the Red King. Had he died with the rest in the trap he had set, or had he escaped? There was no time to wonder. King or no King, the Royal Guards were coming down those steps, and they came like an avalanche of iron. I saw their stern, cold, double line come sweeping down the broad white stair in a long wave of glittering steel. But only a few of them ever reached the stair-foot.

Half-way down the steps I saw them all stagger and crumple and go to pieces. Cool, brave, crafty Señor Torres, and wild old desert-hawk El Zanek, and his iron-nerved master "the little Giaour!" Hearts of oak, all! How well they had waited, how terribly they had replied to that charge! From the Maxims had spurted two wicked thin

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streams that played to right and left across the Guards' ranks like the streams of water from a fire-hose. Nothing that man's brain ever has conceived is deadlier than that thin stream!

At that distance the steel-jacketed bullets crashed through the iron corselets and coats of chain-mail as if they were tinware. A few reeled out from that storm of death and died on the swords of Ingulf and Prince Hakon with his handful of men-at-arms—who had leaped like hounds on their flanks—and on the Frenchman's fatal rapier. Then into that raving shambles on the stair the Arabs began shooting pitilessly.

Then began a butchery that might have found a parallel in Mehemet Ali's grim murder of the Mamelukes. I remembered De Roquemort's terrible phrase about the *mitrailleuse*—the red rain of death—and sick with the horror I tried to turn my eyes away, but its cold fascination always drew them back again.

The slaves huddled by the fountain rose up and fled shrieking. Stark fear was stamped upon their faces. They could not stop their ears to the cries and groans of the dying, nor shut their eyes to the red nightmare they saw. In their maddest dreams they had never thought to behold a sight like that.

AT LAST it was all done. The Valkyrian Guard was annihilated. The handful of archers left, who, without a leader, had seen from the safe vantage of the side galleries the Royal Guards die like valiant men in that rain of steel, threw down their arms, awed and cowed. They were spared.

Below on the blood-stained stairs that writhing, quivering heap of what had been proud, brave, gallant humanity a few brief minutes ago was a red reminder they would never forget in this world!

Presently it was quiet and still, as if such grim sights were never intended in the scheme of things on earth; and above the white court wheeled silently the black wing of a bird of prey. Yet the mellow crimson glow of the fading sunset still lingered across the dead soldiers, and from the tangled ranks glittered here and there the steel points of their weapons, like jewels of fire.

The broad bar of crimson sank yet lower across the palace front, gilding the empty galleries in turn. For a fleeting fraction of time I saw silhouetted in red relief on an upper gallery a great form in fiery armor, with a distorted face above a flaming red beard. For another instant it stood there motionless as some iron colossus of Despair—then it had disappeared.

"The Red King!" burst a roar of voices below. "The Butcher himself!"

But Raoul de Roquemort was the first to collect his wits.

"A thousand gold Louis apiece to those who take him dead or alive!" he roared. "To me, desert-hawks all! *A moi!* El Zanek, Mohammed, Ali! Off and after him!"

Twenty men dashed straight for the stair. But faster than Raoul de Roquemort and all his wild wolf-pack sped Prince Hakon. He saw the throne that was almost won slipping away from him. Like a greyhound he sped across the open, and in a flash I comprehended his purpose.

Well he knew where the royal fox would run to earth—the lower galleries giving to the street level, the blind burrow beneath the keep that led to the river-embankment and safety, unless he could be cut off. Prince Hakon was a brave soldier, but not dull-witted; although, like many another before him, he would make himself a parricide in the end to win a throne.

He reached the stair-foot a full ten paces ahead of any, and springing up the steps turned, waved his sword and disappeared through the brazen doors.

Hard after him coursed Ingulf and all the pack.

They poured into the palace in full cry, like hounds that bay behind a hunted quarry, and went raging and stamping through all the empty, silent halls; upsetting the few terror-stricken scullions they found in the kitchen and frightening the royal courtesans half out of their wits with their lean, fierce dark faces. But the royal prey had cheated them! They nosed into every square foot of the keep, from eaves to cellar; except, in fine, the Jotuns' treasure-chamber.

The Giaour, for good reasons, saw to that. But the chase was bootless, as Prince Hakon well knew it must be. He knew what they did not know: that the King was escaping into the city to arouse his army and throw a net of troops around the palace, although he was aware that half the army had no love for the Butcher. But that half was elsewhere on the frontier!

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The truth had flashed over me. If Prince Hakon, the pretender to the throne, failed to destroy his fleeing uncle, his last hope was to beat the royal couriers, who would be sent off to Aluki in the northern province where Hakon's own regiments garrisoned the frontier. These troops idolized the prince; once at their head, he was safe. Would Hakon reach Aluki to light the red blaze of revolution—I asked myself tensely as the uproar ebbed away.

THE day was dying now. And at last came ill news, after a brief, bitter interval of torturing suspense. The Red King had got loose into the city. The Devil was unchained! And the King's heir was missing too; but his stately, quiet half-sister seemed strangely undisturbed. She was staring into the dusk.

"He will not fail," the girl said proudly as if in echo of my thoughts. "How well I know his heart of oak! There are still brave soldiers in Valkyria who will die at his bidding, and yonder in the north, at Aluki his own regiment is waiting. Would that they were here, Jar, would that they were here!" And suddenly she burst into a stormy flood of tears.

I was silent, dismayed by that depth of her revealed despair in the very hour of that victory, shaken more than I have power to put into words. Then, over the crimsoned sea of spires and roofs, I pointed to the western gates of the city.

"Look there!"

A distant swirl of dust swept away from the city's gates, past the line of mighty cliffs, whose gigantic crests were weirdly etched in fire by the lurid, golden glare across the sky. Behind the first another swirl of dust swept out—then another and another. They were horsemen, galloping like the wind; but what couriers and what cause? Were they the hawks and the quarry? Had Prince Hakon escaped from the city, and were those four riders friends or foes? We did not know; it was impossible to know. We could only guess and watch until the windows became black rectangles of shadow against the dusk, and the lights began to flare up in the streets.

It began to rain with a pitiless steadiness as if it would never stop. A vague, dim curtain of fine mist had settled down over the city, giving it a curious resemblance to some huge modern metropolis in the fog. Only the rumble of wheels and the long grind and roar of the tramcars seemed missing out of that illusion.

Goblin figures passed to and fro in the fog. The light glimmered feebly through it from the fiery torch held mockingly and inscrutably outstretched with an ironic dignity by the colossal statue of the mad philosopher they had burned alive for his reward. Stentorian voices abruptly began bellowing hoarse commands, there was a faint clash of steel. Soldiers! But the rain and fog had made them invisible.

I felt very weak, suddenly and ravenously hungry, but could not eat a mouthful till I had asked of Norma the question whose answer I had already guessed only too well.

"And Lord Chalmes?"

"Dead! In the next room," she said with an icy shiver.

I bowed my head silently.

"He died like a true Englishman," I said at last, feeling a crushing sense of loss. "He was a better man than I will ever be, Norma."

I realized that I had no hunger any more.

"May the peace of God rest forever with his gallant soul." I added gravely, "Amen."

I went in and looked long at his still, white face, so curiously grave and peaceful in death, that in life had always smiled so mockingly from those chill, carven, patrician lips I had once almost hated. But the mocking smile was gone at last, and in its place was a look of unearthly calm that saddened me.

THEY buried him on the morrow in a little plot of greensward by the fountains, in the white courtyard where the long shadow of the keep fell always. The rain was still beating monotonously and pitilessly out of a gray bitter sky, and we stood uncovered in the keen chill of the dawn to watch this sad burial of an English peer in Valkyria.

I sometimes wonder now whether any of the cynical, hysterical great ladies of London, who have so often laid their pretty white wreaths of flowers above the coffin of some popular military hero or polar explorer, would have troubled to lay one here; and what the impeccable, lean, saturnine *post-obit* paragraphers of the *Times* would have said or done, in their ponderous fashion. Or what the very severe but manly

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females of the Suffrage Party who rail so luridly of the "degenerate British Aristocracy," would have said to see this favorite son of the *Cordon Bleu* lowered into his alien grave.

Would they have understood what he died for?

To two of us at least it was the Great Tragedy of Valkyrian days. As the clods fell dripping upon the coffin, under the beating rain, Norma broke down and sobbed convulsively. She had found out that after all she had loved the dead peer somewhat. So I led her away gently as I could. Later I saw to it that there was a stone cross set up, and on it I had carved deeply this inscription:

Here lies
All That Is Not Immortal of
ROBERT PIERS CROYDON,
VISCOUNT CHALMES
A Peer of England, and of Valkyria
Oct. 8, 1896

But it does not stand there today.

CHAPTER XXII

PHAIMA SPEAKS

WE WERE lords of the palace and the keep, or so it seemed. There were plenty of cowed and beaten slaves and awed serfs to do our bidding, and we lost no time in letting them know that we were their masters now. The same lash the Butcher had used so often upon his idle thralls and parasites hung usefully upon an iron hook where he had left it, and swarthy Señor Torres knew well how to use the lash. It was in his bloodstrain to flog with understanding a cringing, sullen mutineer for the exercise which seemed proper to a *caballero* like himself.

There was good food without stint in the Red King's kitchen and many a stout cask of brown mead, of ale, and goodly wine in the Red King's cellars. We had no need of anything else save water, which is the best of all the things that go gurgling down a man's throat, and water there was in plenty.

But the Arabs were of another mind; the writ-and-summons of the Prophet ran—if it ran at all—elsewhere. After their long abstinence they drank what pleased them best, and swaggered up and down the courtyard with the pride of the conqueror, the greed of gold, and often the lust of sin written plainly enough across their somber faces, for all who could read the human pages not in print.

Yet their formidable captain El Zanek knew how to chasten his iron brood, and they never got far out of the hollow of that lean, wicked old hand. As for himself, he had got a courtesan or two; and it would seem that he differed little from the sometime soldiers of fortune in most parts and ages of the world, from Sir John Mandeville to Athos, Porthos and Aramis.

He made, none the less, a little mistake when he saw fit to appear in public with a laughing, languishing black-eyed girl coquettishly hanging upon each side, for from around the corner stepped Raoul de Roquemort who had a trick of being in many places unexpectedly. What followed was interesting.

Their eyes met. There was a grim stare from master to man and an icy-cool gesture, a gleam of something bright, a curt, biting phrase in Arabic that cuts like a steel saw and is reserved for such occasions.

Effectually sobered, that old iniquity humbly slunk away. His *houris* vanished separately. There was no more drinking after that. By some obscure telepathy, a wordless edict was enforced mysteriously, I suppose by El Zanek himself, who bowed to a force superior to Kismet: the Giaour's will.

To me the episode was tremendous. As I saw it enacted, it illustrated lucidly that man's singular power over circumstances and men; and it dismayed me. What hope was there for Cecil Rhodes' dream of destiny in the face of a reality that stood like a rock wall of fact? The fact against the dream. Men and guns and that iron will behind them—where did I come in? With the Butcher of Valkyria holding the city and the Marquis de Roquemort holding the citadel, there was no room for Cecil Rhodes. Could Ingulf cut that knot if he were King? I remembered the Jotuns' Saga:

Ingulf his name must be
Who wins this Treasure:
DEAD MEN SAY TRUE . . .

IF HAKON were dead, as seemed like enough, the third faction was without a leader. Yet I had formed a great liking for the prince and hoped that he had escaped to Aluki and would raise the standard of revolution. As for Ingulf, had he not already fulfilled part of the Saga?

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I had, though, little faith in prophecies. Would he ever fulfil the rest? What did it matter? I knew that when the fog lifted we would be attacked in overwhelming force.

All night through the rain we had caught the steady, ominous tramp of soldiers in the streets of the city. They were massing in the main square below the palace and in the narrow side streets, as our sentries had marked and reported, within only a few hundred yards of the watch-towers on the walls, but just out of bow-shot. We were surrounded; and, from the long sweep of their close-drawn lines, by full five or six regiments of archers and footmen. Fully half of the Red King's army lay camped before the walls in the fog.

The remaining regiments with his picked cavalry lay at Aluki—straight as the crow flies some fifteen leagues north. It was necessary always to keep a strong garrison stationed on the frontier to overawe the fierce, restless, half-barbarian race of untamed highland breed who lived in the northern province, but lived as free men, not as serfs. They bore, in fine, much the same opinions of Valkyria as the wild Picts and Scots had borne for the Roman garrisons in Britain, until the Emperor Honorius had withdrawn his legions to face other foes.

It was not a safe policy, nor a wise one. And they craned necks hungrily, and cast fierce, greedy eyes, ever toward the more civilized, luxury-loving capital, with its paradise-like wonders, its wickedness, its wealth, and its reputed gods and devils, and swore in their wild hearts that one day they would march upon it—as Alaric the Goth marched on Rome. And march they would but for that thin, menacing line of steel that always faced them at the northern frontier.

But the Red King seemed in no hurry to attack. His crafty policy was evidently to set around us such a cordon of steel-clad infantry as we would never break through, while he waited for the fog to lift. With half his best troops at Aluki, he was not anxious, after the terrible lesson the Frenchman had taught him, to throw away the rest in the fog, against the deadly new weapons he had seen annihilate at one stroke the Valkyrian Guard whom he had believed invincible.

In that dripping gray mist sweeping in sullenly off the dim sheet of the lake and the steaming river, we knew the bowstrings of the king's archers were useless, wax them as they would; he must wait for it to break, ere the bowmen could see their mark to shoot at.

But the fog did not break as he hoped. It settled like a pall over the streets and houses, over the beleaguered keep and the lines of the enemy alike, until through that ghostly wrack of mist men could scarcely see each other a yard away.

Then the rain stopped beating at last; but the long trail of smoke that hung forever above the dying volcano drifted back and mingled with the fog till it effectually shut out the sun—it was no more now than a sickly yellow candle-glare against the sky at midday.

IN THOSE black hours of dull inaction, which passed like dreams, I found time to think. But the more swiftly the whirling thoughts kept crowding through my dulled brain the more baffling was the problem I had to face—how to keep my pledge to Cecil Rhodes. Yet if there were a key at all to such a puzzle, that key was Ingulf. And I fell to thinking again with every sense awake but coldly, almost terribly concentrated. The key, yes, it was Ingulf; but how to turn it in the lock? If Hakon and the royal drunkard destroyed each other, or if Hakon were already gone and De Roquemort destroyed the drunkard, then . . .

Always that tangled skein wound back to that invincible man who held us all in the hollow of his blue-blooded hands—the inscrutable Marquis de Roquemort!

Surely the French nation must have some magic in its veins, since it had produced successively a Richelieu, a Napoleon, a Voltaire, and a De Roquemort! Had he guessed my secret mission? Had he read Ingulf's identity? Had he linked him with his dead ancestor, as I had done, and even if he believed Ingulf was the real King, would he not demolish him as ruthlessly and set up Hakon on the throne? Very likely he would do that. But if Hakon never turned up would De Roquemort make his peace then with the Butcher?

No. It was not in his code of honor. It was not in his high birth nor in his cool courage. He would never become a traitor to such a code as he must have had from his youth—for so many years, he would never turn back upon such a road as that.

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I had seen one man die sublimely because he too had a code that he would not change. Every baser instinct he possessed—and all men have a few base instincts—must have recoiled against that sacrifice. A few moments' delay and he could have lived—and probably won *the* woman. But there was the unalterable code. It was very simple. So he came back in the room and died.

No. De Roquemort would never make a truce with the Butcher. If Hakon never turned up, it might mean nothing less than complete annihilation for us all, but Raoul de Roquemort would go down with the rest of us. He detested the fog. All true Gascons from the South of sunny France abhor a sad sky. He smoked the very last one of his monogrammed cigarettes; taking a turn restlessly up and down the anteroom.

I watched him—polite, bored, *triste*, with the ring of confidence in every heel-tap. Then I walked over and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Well, Raoul de Roquemort the king-maker!"

"*Bien!* my friend you seem sarcastic? *Peste!* The king-maker? And what of it?"

I pointed significantly through the window.

"Look there!" I said. "The fog is breaking! What do you see? Six regiments of infantry waiting to spring at our throats! Before this time tomorrow we will be attacked in tremendous force, and God help us then! We can not hold this place against fifty times our number. We are like rats in a trap! And you ask 'what of it?'" I said bitterly. "You, the king-maker! That is your work."

"You are wrong, monsieur!" he said calmly. "It is the work of destiny, not mine, and Fate is the *croupier* who turns the wheel of life. As for me, I have but played my own stake on the table with yours and all the rest. What matter, since all have an equal chance at *le banque du Diable?* Have you forgotten the machine-guns, monsieur? These *canaille* can not face them. After all, *qu'est-ce que c'est que ça—un abattoir*, to pile up sheep in a slaughter trench! Bah! I tell you they will never stand up to the *mitrailleuse!*"

He had told me nothing! But this time I was recklessly resolved to get the probe in deep; to get at what he knew. So I continued ruthlessly:

"Don't deceive yourself. You can't keep them off forever. Your ammunition won't last. And after that, what? I can tell you. No quarter for us, and for the women, worse than death!" In spite of his superb *sang-froid* he blanched a little. "How do you like it now—" and I launched a last staggering shaft—"Mr. Emissary of Leopold?"

HE STARTED sharply and gave me a swift, flashing side-glance. Suddenly he laughed. And to my sheer surprise he sent back a better one, with a cutting-edge to it as keen and hard as a diamond.

"You enlighten me, monsieur," said he ironically. "You fly so unmistakably the Union Jack! You fairly unwrap its silken folds under my nose, and br-r-r-r—you run it up to the peak! Yes, that Flag! *Pardieu!* I never guess at things. The old rule of 'two and two make four,' *Voilà!* Reverse it, mark you, and two away from four leave always two.

"Ah, well, as masks are off at last and you will have it so, shall I tell you whose emissary *you* are? You, Captain Severn, carry the epaulets of your colonizing Premier—Cecil Rhodes! So be it! The king-maker against the empire-builder! We shall see who wins."

He had hipped me once more. But the Devonshire breed is stubborn; I eyed him doggedly.

"We shall see," I threw in. "The play is not played out until the curtain falls."

"Exactly—you put it like a diplomat! And meanwhile we fight in a common cause?"

"For three women's honor—yes."

"And after that, monsieur?"

"Pistols, if I may suggest. Valkyria would be too small to hold us both, and I have no fancy to be pinned like a fly on that devil's rapier of yours."

"Sacred name of twenty thousand *fiacres!*" quoth he delightedly. "By my father's grave in Gascony, you are a true English bulldog after all! Be it so. Pistols if you insist. *Voyons!*" He inquired with an air of solicitude that was real: "And your wounds, my friend of many days, how are they now?" His concern was so genuinely unforced that it amazed me.

"My wounds are nothing—a few sword-slashes under the skin, and a rap across the head."

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And then Sherry's face appeared in the door, with other faces behind him: Dr. Eric Ivarsson's, and Ingulf's.

The marquis nodded to them gallantly, with his Gascon courtesy.

"Eh, *mon ami*," he queried of Sherry, "what report of the enemy's videttes, of the siege? What news of the prince?"

"The fog is clearing off," quoth Sherry, "and the moat is swirling full of water, racing like the river Taw! Their pickets are closing in. We are in for a ripping row!" he added, grinning cheerfully. But at length his jaw fell. He caught our eyes and shook his head.

"No sign from Prince Hakon. Dead, perhaps, poor devil! He will never come back——"

THE girl Phaïma had glided in silently behind him, her expressive face ablaze with the pale light of enthusiasm I had seen once before. The girl seemed sometimes strangely gifted with a power that was akin to inspiration, and perhaps not altogether earthly.

"He will come back," she said simply, with that pale blaze of prophecy flashing out. "You do not know him as I do. He will come back. The gods in Valhalla will preserve him. He will come, and his tall Jotuns behind him, all in glittering mail on their great war-horses! You have not seen those men, my lords, and the white, dim Valkyries who seem to ride like the wind behind them, far, far up above in the blue cloud-driven sky!"

Then she paused, as every eye was turned toward her in a sort of hushed expectancy, and a look of intense horror crept slowly over her beautiful, stately face.

"Valkyria!" she gasped in an amazed, thrilling voice. "Can such things be on earth? Or am I mad to dream of them? To dream that Valkyria so soon must fall! Gone! The white, proud city builded more by gods than men—gone!" Suddenly her voice sank. "Valkyria! Oh well-loved pleasant City of the Lost, with her gardens of Paradise—her courts of sin—all swallowed by a red sea of flame! Gone her noble palaces and queenly temples—I see them all toppling together in red ruin, and the fierce flames lapping over them pitilessly, leaping hungrily out of the earth up to the black sky, quenchless, eager flames lit by the angry gods who have decreed that Valkyria shall fall—forever!"

She staggered back and dropped in a dead swoon.

Ingulf lifted the girl up gently in his strong arms and laid her inert, shapely figure down on the marble couch that was no whiter than her face.

And even then I marveled at the human heart of a woman! For Norma—a white vision of pity that I can still see framed in the doorway—imperiously waved back the yellow-faced, ashen slaves, who came crowding closer, and with a little sob of dismay flew instantly to the side of this daughter of a pagan race.

Minutes after, Phaïma opened her eyes. They had a shot, strained expression in them. The girl seemed dazed as they led her into another room, still shuddering.

"By Jove!" said Sherry in a gasp, tapping the silent doctor nervously on the breastbone with a shaky forefinger. "An uncomfortable presentiment the young lady had, if it all comes true. But it's all tommyrot, eh?"

The old archeologist shuddered as he replied:

"My friend, I sometimes think that our modern world, with its levity and its cynicism, makes a strange error in taking at their face valuation only these startling phenomena of nature and the human brain. My own mind has convinced me that even among the barbarian races of the earth the faculty of 'second sight' is not so impossible as it seems. True, they are only predictions of an individual; but they have a weird way of working out, as if they were suggested by some glimpse behind the screen.

"There is no doubt that among the primitive Northmen of Iceland there arose, at long intervals of time, 'Alruna women,' or seers, who predicted things which frequently came true. This girl with her pure mind may have some spark of genius, like the poets of the Victorian Age, that help her to make a better guess at the future than most of us. And I confess, for my part, that this city of Valkyria, with those millions of liters of gas drained from the volcano and stored in a hollow catacomb of stone pipes and giant reservoirs beneath its streets, seems to me like a city built above some sleeping caldron of fire, waiting to engulf it all!"

He was silent. I looked at my watch; it

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was almost six o'clock. In half an hour the darkness would come.

The Marquis seemed to read my thoughts.

"At daylght," he said coolly, "they will attack. The moat is impassable tonight for footmen or archers, and the drawbridge is the only key to the keep. *Morbleu!* my hawks are on watch at every covert. The Red King will not throw away his troops in the dark!"

MRS. ROUNTREE came in noiselessly. She wanted her glass-stoppered bottle of smelling-salts from the window-seat for Phaïma. The princess was quite calm at last. She herself appeared pale and unnerved. She was, in spite of it all, still as pallidly beautiful as some white statue of Peace, with her youthful, calm face, big vivid black eyes and black hair that was growing slightly silvered with gray. The gray had not shown there at all four months ago!

The French soldier of fortune eyed her with silent appreciation. She was at once both the exact negative of his volatile and fiery personality and that strange paradox, its absolute "plus." The handsome widow fascinated him; perhaps it was her eternal serenity. He even smiled at her subtly now. He made a gay gesture, then bent gallantly and kissed her white hand.

The smile and the gesture seemed to shatter her calm.

"Ah! Raoul," she said, "you frighten me with your *sang-froid!* Is there some dreadful danger hanging over us?"

The Marquis laughed. With disarming audacity he had chucked her under her pretty chin.

"Be at rest, *ma cherie!*" he replied gravely. "You are as safe here as in the Tuilleries in Paris. *Pouf!* there will be a road to France and to the world tomorrow! I promise you that my Black Company would clear a path to Valhalla itself if only it were on earth. *Allons!* Take a turn with me in the courtyard—in the evening hush! . . . the peace! . . . "

He linked arms with her and they went out.

Mechanically I ate and drank. Hours drifted by. A dark starless vault shut in the mystery of night. At midnight we made an unexpected round of the pickets along the walls; the Giaour was taking no chances of surprise by a night attack. The result stirred in me a new respect for his grip on the unstable souls of men. Heads abruptly popped out of black corners like life-sized and inhuman Jacks-in-a-box. Eyes gleamed at us out of the dark: the preludes for sudden, sharp challenges. The Frenchman's hawks were awake.

All of the rest snatched stoical, amazing sleep. So we went back and waited. The night wore away, till at last, through the dim black rectangles of the palace windows, glimmered the ghost of the dawn.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW THE BLACK COMPANY HELD THE KEEP

THE TALL black windows of the room swiftly paled to gray, and faded into white. The day was breaking, and in the east glowed a pale bar of flame. Leaving the palace still asleep, we went out through the shadowy corridors, each man grimly looking to his weapons as we went, and made our way across the dim courtyard to the sheer, huge gray walls of the keep.

As we reached the battlements, the faint rosy gleam of sunrise was breaking across the sky—a sunrise as clear and perfect as if there had never been a shadow of men's sordid plots, their loves and hates, and their fatal ambitions, to mar its almost unearthly beauty. It gilded the tall white temple fanes and stately spires with a broad sweep of molten flame, and flashed from the steel caps of the men-at-arms, now moving to and fro like ants in the King's great armed camp below us, that seemed suddenly stirring to life.

It glittered, too, upon the steel cuirasses of that broken company of archers, whom the French soldier of fortune—ever the same bold, politic leader of men—had managed already to impress into his iron service. Half with threats and promises, and half by pointing out their strangely hopeless and desperate plight, he had won them like Cæsar's self. If the Butcher triumphed they would be slain like sheep for deserters, while at the first sign of treachery the Arab mercenaries would turn their guns on them and wipe them out. Well they knew that he spoke the truth. For the rest, if we won the day they would be well rewarded and enlisted in the next Valkyrian Guard.

It was the fortune of war; a shift of the

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pawns upon the board. And they had joined him readily enough, already half alienated by the King's mad cruelties and tyranny. About a hundred strong, they were all picked men and master-bowmen, who could drive their terrible three-foot arrows through a mail corselet at fifty paces. With Hakon's two-score men-at-arms, the new levies brought our force up to some two hundred fighting men.

The odds against us were colossal. Two hundred men against six regiments of infantry, and a foe able to bring up crushing reinforcements. Yet to look at the fighting smile of the invincible Marquis de Roquemort—unruffled, superbly confident and icy-cool—you might have guessed the shoe was on the other foot. For the little Giaour was never so dangerous as when he smiled. I had learned that when he appeared sad you might tread upon his tail and escape perhaps alive, when he smiled—never.

It was true we possessed an extraordinary advantage over our foes in the terrible superiority of modern weapons of war over mere bows and axes. Yet I had already seen how deadly straight and far those tall archers could send their fatal shafts, and I thought of the long-vanished, stricken fields of Crecy and Poictiers, where the mail-clad chivalry of France had all gone down together in a red wave of men and horses before the biting rain of the English arrows—archers who had drawn no better bows than these! And as I looked down at the dense mass of men-at-arms and bowmen in the sudden hush which had fallen on them all, it came over me that I was about to witness such a fight as every man who lived through it would keep in his waking dreams—a murder fierce and fell.

For we held an almost impregnable fortress.

THE great keep reared its hoary head, like some huge monster of the past, on a commanding rise of ground which sloped off sharply on either side. Before it lay the wide, deep moat full twenty-five yards across, with fifteen feet of dark-green water swirling in long eddies like a mill-race, till it boiled over a dam at its far end into a canal intended to drain off the backwash of the city's sewage. On the northerly side of the keep a broad loop of the river washed sullenly against a deep embankment that fell away to a sheer drop of fifty feet; while to the west the broken spur of the mountainside ran out to the steep rise on which the palace stood.

Only a steeplejack could have come up that cliff of naked rock, worn smooth by the rains of ages long as they fell down it into the river. A drain at the foot of the cliff, jagged with protruding rocks making navigation impossible, fed the moat from the rapid current of the river.

From the heavy gate of the keep was a steep slope down to where the moat was ordinarily crossed. Two round barbican towers of buttressed masonry rose from the center of the moat—a permanent bridge connecting them with the castle shore, and a drawbridge with the outer shore. The drawbridge was up and a small force was sufficient to hold the towers.

In the fog, hours ago, I had walked on top all around the walls of the castle. They were ten feet thick. Under cover of that humid veil of mist, I had explored the place alone. Its tremendous, cruel strength, its forbidding sweep had staggered me.

At last I comprehended clearly why the King had not attacked us ere now in that rock-built eyrie till the fog lifted. He knew the strength of the place and its power to stand a siege. An assault could come only on its eastern side. Whoever would take that keep must attack from the square and the narrow streets in front. And at last I understood how the Valkyrian kings had held their mailed grip for so many centuries on this barbarian race whose wild pagan hands must have torn their dynasty from the throne long since—had it been a thing they could have done.

Such was the grim citadel of Valkyria. In truth it was a fortress worth defending. Yet to pit six regiments against barely two hundred men! We were hemmed in a huge rock trap.

But if we could not get out, the King's army would find it hard to get in. De Roquemort had drawn in his pickets from the walls and posted the archers in their stead where they could shoot down into the enemy from the battlements.

Below, from fifty loop-holes, the Black Company faced the foe; and at the embrasures I saw, on both sides of the huge iron gates of the keep, the black gleam of a machine-gun manned by Señor Torres and the gaunt-faced ex-artilleryman of Egypt.

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Sherry came up close to me and caught my arm.

He pointed at the dense mass of the King's army, that was beginning to stir at last.

"They are moving!" he burst out. "Our little row with the Matabele was nothing to this." His jaw dropped. "By Gad! There will be some carnage before long!"

The old scientist droned behind his shoulder:

"It is Homeric. The old against the new!" His cracked, aged voice added harshly: "Steel bullets against the steel armor of the past. It is epic—the Iron Age rising to crush Today. I wonder if they will do it?"

His old face was twitching fiercely. Hunched at his hips I saw he had two big pistols crammed in leather holsters, and a magazine-rifle standing in a niche of the wall. In strange contrast, a pace beyond, clad in the chain-mail of his martial ancestors, Ingulf stood leaning on his gigantic sword. His eyes seemed like points of flame as he stood watching the foe.

ALL that remains in my memory still like some wildly vivid dream-picture that I seemed to have seen more than once before, the vague, mad illusion of some old life lived long ago. A few seconds more, and the red ball of the sun came gliding sublimely above the brilliant rim of the vast bowl-shaped crater, and with it came the Red King's soldiers with a roar like the sea on the beach, and a long shiver of steel.

They came sweeping up to the attack, rank upon rank in their close-packed, brave array, with the sun-blaze on their steel harness and the long, scarlet pennons floating out gallantly over each company; forty men-at-arms deep, with three regiments of foot forming the chest of their army, and a regiment of archers banked on either side; another regiment in reserve. Little they guessed the grim reception that was waiting for them. The red game of war has changed little since the campaigns of William the Conqueror; but its weapons have grown more deadly.

At the moat they recoiled. No one was anxious to try that passage. Even cavalry would have balked at that fifteen feet of swirling green water, full seventy-five feet wide from brink to shore. Yet crossed it must be.

Out strode a giant in mail and bellowed a deep command. It was the Red King.

A moment we saw him, then he was hidden from view. And watching keenly the dark mass of the foe, I saw some dozen men in brown-leather jerkins drag up several great wooden scaling-ladders, each having an iron grapnel on one end.

Presently the mailed swarm parted and I could see long lines of men pulling on ropes, and dragging forward on rude rollers some colossal, dim objects, the sight of which instantly made my heart jump inside my chest. Then I saw that they were long Viking galleys. In the fog they had been floated up close by way of the river, and the King's design was plainly to launch them in the moat to ferry his soldiers across.

It was an unexpectedly bold and cunning scheme and the best way to get the thing done, since the great moat drained off its overflow into the canal, down a rock-walled dam with a fall of almost twenty feet, up which it was not in men's power to drag the galleys. The largest of them was nearly fifty feet long, with double oar-banks in the waist, and high, curved bow and stern; and had a tall white horse-head carved out from the swell of the bow. In my brain, at sight of that strange figurehead, surged up dim memories of the fabled wooden horse of Troy. One of the others had a lion's head carved on the prow, and another a vulture's beak.

They launched them with a thick swarm of men in each, and still no sign from De Roquemort, though they had drifted broadside on, well under shot from the keep. Was he mad, I asked myself, to allow those galleys to land the troops?

"It is time!" he rapped out suddenly. "The rats are aboard their own trap." He was watching the galleys with a grim smile. "Let your guns go!" he roared to the Portuguese. *"Now!"*

TO THE grave, my memory will carry that scene. I can see it still! The crowded galleys had drifted into midstream. The swarms of men on board them tried to cover themselves with a row of shields, the rowers hampered by the close-jammed crews striving to ship their oars.

Then went up a yell of fear, so mad, so piercing, that it rose high above the long, steady, spitting roar of the machine-guns.

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A frightful spurt of steel missiles played upon the hapless galleys, hurtling through the rotten planking at the water-line, till the green water boiled in from a hundred gaps and holes.

Sickened by the sight, I averted my eyes.

When I looked again, the big galley with the horse-head figurepiece had swung around and was going down by the stern. A raving swarm of men in her fought for possession of the bow, while the terrible steel rain beat them into a gory heap of shrieking madmen. Both of the other galleys had settled to the water's edge and were filling swiftly. Then the dark water hissed across their gunwales and they went down.

The wreckage of sinking galleys and writhing bodies choked the stream, then they were gone. The armor of the men-at-arms dragged them down to the black slime at the bottom of the moat, and in a few seconds all that remained of those who had embarked was a long ripple of green water, from which the white horse-head still protruded as if with a mocking, wild irony of desolation. Some few of the Arabs, carried beyond themselves, broke from their posts at the loop-holes and mounted the ramparts, the better to watch what was happening. But the cool voice of the French Giaour pealed above the roar of the guns.

"Down, down, wolves of the Black Company!" he cried. "Have you forgotten the archers! Back to the loop-holes! Not a man must show his head above the walls unless he cares to be pierced with arrows like a pin-cushion. To your posts!"

The Arabs obeyed. And suddenly the storm of arrows from the King's archers broke loose, whistling past the heads of the men upon the parapets. But to that fire our own veteran bowmen replied with deadly effect, the long shafts screaming down and burying themselves to the feather in the bodies of the King's soldiers, massed upon the edge of the moat. Nearly two hundred men were put out of the action by the fatal aim of our archers, while we lost barely half-a-dozen in return.

And still, under cover of that whistling hail of archery, they thrust out a bridge roughly improvised of rafts and pontoons brought up from the rear, although the deadly cross-fire from the machine-guns swept away each time those who had the temerity to launch them. Fresh bodies of men were brought up with a ruthless disregard of certain death, the Red King was throwing away the lives of his soldiers on a magnificent scale. The moat was half-choked with the crimson wreckage of men and timbers, and the pontoons grounded against the sunken galleys and jammed fast.

It was impossible to prevent them from landing the troops; and across the swaying bridge a dense column of men-at-arms reeled forward to the assault, while the guns in less than ten minutes had piled up nearly fifteen hundred dead and wounded below the keep.

They strove vainly to storm the barbican towers, but gave up that futile attempt and strove to hook the iron grapnels of the great scaling-ladders over the rampart. Three times the pitiless stream of bullets fairly blew them back from the muzzles of the guns.

It was a sight to freeze the blood in a man's veins. As fast as one deep rank of wild faces surged up and was suddenly swept away, another row appeared behind them, only to be mowed down in turn, as if by the stroke of some mighty scythe.

At last they drew back, aghast.

DOWN the slope before the gray limestone walls there lay a windrow of corpses six feet high, over which they had to literally climb to get at us. Well nigh two regiments of the King's army lay shattered in that writhing line of horror which still heaved slowly up and down like the coils of some enormous sleeping monster, with its tail flung trailing back right into the crimsoned waters of the moat where a third regiment had met annihilation. Of the Butcher's proud array there remained now only its chest, and a single regiment of reserves drawn up in the great square below, under the colossal statue of the dead Philosopher. They had not yet come into the action.

Overhead in the placid blue sky wheeled the shadowy brigade of the silent scavengers of the air—waiting with the vulture's patience.

There was a menacing lull—then, suddenly like a tidal wave, the foe burst through and over the barrier of dead and dying and surged right up to the iron gates.

The Marquis de Roquemort watched them come, with an absent, curiously sad smile.

"Name of Napoleon!" he swore, amazed. "They are men! With five army corps like

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that in Europe, and modern artillery behind them, I could avenge Sedan! . . . Hark! As I live, they are beating in the gates!"

Crash! Fifty men swung a giant ram against the iron portals of the keep. They had brought up a huge tree-trunk, with the limbs lopped to gain hold. Once more it thundered against the gates, then the machine-guns belched a hell-storm of steel and the whole reeling fabric of men and ram abruptly collapsed.

For the moment the attack was checked as the guns swept away its first broken wave. Yet I knew the lull could not last. I stared at the bulging hinges set in the masonry, the bent iron-work was beaten inward by the powerful blows of the ram. One more assault like that and the gates must be driven in. But the Frenchman had seen it too.

"To me, archers!" roared De Roquemort. "To me, men-at-arms, and hold the keep! We will beat them yet!"

They obeyed. The archers had shot away their last shafts, but protected by the ramparts they had lost only a few men; and every man among them was a picked swordsman, encased in steel helmet and mail cuirass.

They swarmed down from the wall and massed behind the guns, drawing their long, heavy swords; while the men-at-arms headed by Ingulf ranged themselves alongside with an answering yell. Like an echo, a woman's voice pealed out above every other sound.

It was Phaïma's voice! She stood fearlessly upon the perilously narrow stone window-ledge of the jutting main wing of the palace, like a white angel of battle, pointing to the north.

"*The Jotuns!* They come, they come! Look! See their sword-points flash in the sun! Prince Hakon of Valkyria did not die! The gods have sent him back! We win the day!"

I swept my eyes to the north.

Beyond the King's lines, over the wide maze of narrow streets spread out below like a panorama, I saw a moving cloud of dust wheel around the great loop of the Aluki road, then sweep straight up to the city's gates. The sun-blaze caught a fiery glitter of keen flashing white sparks in the whirl of dust—the light glancing from the points of the weapons of a great body of cavalry swiftly coming closer.

ABOVE the roar of the battle I heard the steady drumming of thousands of hoofs, and presently I caught the rippling sheen of five thousand mail cuirasses, all in motion together. They came sweeping up through the broad central artery of Valkyria at the gallop—fifty dragoons abreast; their heavy horses racing neck and neck, and the steel mail of their riders blazing in the African sun—the most magnificent corps of disciplined cavalry that I have ever seen, or ever will again.

At their head rode a man on a great black war-horse—Prince Hakon the Pretender. The troops drawn up in the main square faced about to meet the shock, but too late.

There was a long sweeping charge of the heavy cavalry right through them, crashing into the demoralized mass of archers and men-at-arms, grinding them down under the ramping iron hoofs of the war-horses, and cutting a red lane through the disordered array of footmen. Taken in the rear, they broke and fled like sheep in a mad rout, with Prince Hakon's cavalry thundering in pursuit.

Looking back I saw that the tall white form of the girl, poised perilously on the narrow window-ledge of the palace behind us, had disappeared. Phaïma had gone back. I had a fleeting vision of other faces at the windows, and seemed to see hers among them. She was safe. But the roar of pounding hoof-beats was unheard by the Red King's soldiers who were battering upon the keep once more. It was drowned by the blows of the powerful ram against the gates and the triumphant yell which went up as both huge iron wings fell inward with a grinding crash. We leaped back, barely in time to save ourselves from being buried in the débris of that twisted mass of iron.

A gleaming wave of ax-men poured into the breach, in a terrific assault led by the Red King himself.

They were met by Ingulf's mailed men-at-arms and by De Roquemort and his valiant archers. But the sheer weight of superior numbers forced us to fall back.

Step by step we withdrew across the courtyard and up the broad white stair. On each platform, in succession, we made a stand and left a ring of dead below to mark our stubborn retreat.

At last we drew back in a grim line at the top; and as our foes came surging up

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the remaining steps we stood firm as a steel wall. The long, flashing blades played across our front like a continuous glare of Summer lightning; and the shock of the encounter was like the clang of a hundred anvils ringing out together.

The guns had escaped the disaster. The falling gates had missed them by barely six inches, but for the moment they were useless. Our gunners dared not turn them upon that press of mingled friends and foes. Yet crafty Señor Torres had the supreme presence of mind to train a Maxim across the gaping breach and the gun began to spit a stream of bullets nothing could pass.

I saw De Roquemort pass his rapier through the body of a foe and spin around like a cat to engage another. Then a shadowy form in dull mail harness towered over him and a great ax flashed up.

But the blow fell harmlessly aside as the old scholar of Oxford reached over the Frenchman's shoulder and emptied his revolver into the fierce face of the ax-bearer, who instantly collapsed.

Then I became grimly concerned in defending myself against the rush of a mail-clad Berserker whose glaring eyes gave me a cold shiver as he did his best to cut off my head. A heavy pistol ball stopped him abruptly. To this day I am unaware who it was fired that shot—myself or another.

An exasperated voice was saying,

"Blast you! You would, would you?" And, turning around, I beheld my barrister kinsman blow out the brains of a Valkyrian soldier who was trying to hew off his legs with a formidable ax.

Even as Sherry fired at his tormentor he was forced to spring into the air to avoid the sweep of the ax. But the shot sped true. With a hoarse scream that rang in my ears the soldier dropped dead.

A GIGANTIC figure in dented and blood-stained mail came raging up the stair, swinging an enormous sword. It was the King of Valkyria!

I heard the rattle of the drawbridge, the shouts of the men De Roquemort had posted at the crank and the creak of the great winch. Then the hollow beat of hoofs sounded upon the bridge as the vanguard of Prince Hakon's cavalry thundered across the moat to our aid. Torres stopped firing.

The prince, with a shout to his officers, had leaped from his horse and had thrown himself into that maelstrom of steel where only a man in mail armor could live.

The tall dragoons dismounted by scores under the blackened stone arch and rushed in at his heels to launch themselves upon the King's partisans.

The Red King had cleared a space in front of him by terrible, long sweeps of his sword; and each time he struck home a foe went crashing down the blood-mired steps.

But in vain! The gleaming hedge of swords closed in remorselessly around the King's ax-men, who now saw they were hopelessly outnumbered. Attacked from front and rear, they recoiled.

"They are trapped!" the ex-professor squeaked in my ear. "Look there!" he gurgled. "They are all going mad together with the Berserk rage!"

The King's men were making a last grim stand around the stair-foot and on the red-stained landings from which we had in our turn fallen back as each successive wave of foes had come rolling up.

But it was our turn now, and the gallant remnant of our brave men-at-arms and archers stood waiting at the top for them with dripping blades; while below all raged Prince Hakon and his mailed Jotuns as the last fierce eddy of the fight surged up the steps.

Of the Black Company there were left standing some eighteen gaunt, blood-smeared men, with barely half-a-dozen rounds of cartridges apiece in their bandoliers. All the rest of them were gone to find the dark gates of the Prophet's Paradise and the immortal, shining *houris* of their dreams. Yet the survivors cheered madly as they saw their enemies at last caught and crushed between the upper and nether millstones.

The trapped Valkyrians, drawn up around their King, died hopelessly, like the English at Senlac; but they died hard—all save a few craven-hearted fugitives who hid themselves in the palace; fleeing pell-mell into the deserted side galleries below, that were used by the royal slaves.

They fled with the fear of death in their hearts. Among them I had a momentary glimpse of the convulsed face of Agi the archer—cut off from his fallen master, who, at least, was going to die like a King. I beheld the bowman vanishing into a narrow doorway like a fox hunted to earth.

Behind them rushed the wolf-pack of Hakon, mingled with a few of the Black

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Company. They ruthlessly butchered the King's partisans without quarter wherever they caught them hiding. Those fear-craven wretches knew they had to die—and they died. I heard the muffled echo of gunshots in the slaves' quarters and the dying howls of the quarry. But Hakon's dogs of war, for all their hot search, failed to catch the fleeing Agi, as they found out to their sorrow later.

Meanwhile my eyes roved around for the Arch Priest Fangari, with the commendable purpose of putting an end to all his wicked plots with a bullet; but he too was missing. The cunning priest had either escaped into the city or else had fallen in the assault.

PRESENTLY the red drama was done. The only foe left afoot was the King of Valkyria. He stood on the slippery platform a dozen steps below us, in the center of a ring of dead. None seemed eager to cross swords with that menacing, mailed figure that waited like a wolf at bay for each warrior who came at him; while the blows of his terrible sword clove deep through helmet and mailshirt and ever cut the life strings of their owners.

He was still erect; but as two or three of the Swahilis leveled their pieces to fire, I saw the Marquis de Roquemort suddenly strike up the guns with his long rapier. I think he had the strange hope of pitting himself and his marvelous sword-play against the royal drunkard he had hurled from his throne.

He made a pace forward and stopped—for out from the line of Valkyrians strode Prince Hakon, brandishing a bloody sword. Pretender and parricide though he might have been, his was a heart of oak, and he knew how to make his soldiers idolize him.

Caught in a trap between two foes, the Red King glared around fearfully. Then with a wild shout he rushed up the marble steps. With half-a-dozen great bounds he had reached the top and hewed down a man-at-arms, then another, scattering armed men like chaff.

He leaped straight for the entrance. But his way was barred by Ingulf—a tall Jotun all in mail like himself, with a cold blaze of triumph in his fierce steel-gray eyes, a granite jaw and a huge sword that rose and fell like a bar of light.

They began striking at each other, circling and stamping like a pair of fencers and hammering like smiths in a ringing forge.

By some unwritten freemasonry of battles, men drew back and watched this fell fight rage to and fro without interfering. Foot by foot, as they circled around each other like hawks, the King edged his way toward the great brazen doors. They were flung wide open.

What mad hope he had, what dark treachery lay behind those burning eyes? Who can say? Hard pressed, he stepped backward through the brazen doorway. Ingulf sprang in after him and launched a shower of blows at the King who parried each terrible stroke as it fell, with superb strength and skill, retreating a yard at every step.

They went stamping down the empty corridors, through the arched portal, step by step into the great hall and right up to the foot of the throne.

I followed, with a cocked pistol in my hand and the cold-blooded resolve that at the first sign of evil I would utterly forget the ancient and honorable rules of medieval hand-to-hand combats and shoot the King dead; though it might be next door to murder.

Yet as I watched the keen blue sparks play and shiver, and listened to the iron music of the clashing blades, the conviction came over me again that Ingulf was the real King of Valkyria, and that in some unexpected way he was winning back his kingdom with the sword. Where had he learned that deadly skill at arms unless it were in some royal palace of his youth?

The sparks flew out—the blows clanged like a dozen steel hammers ringing all in chorus; and Ingulf hewed on terribly as if his arm would never weary. The Red King had proved that day that he was the best swordsman in the kingdom, but he could not shake off Ingulf's Berserk fury.

The Butcher at last had met his match with the sword. Backed against the dais like a mad boar, the King could go no farther. If he had sought some hidden door in the wall, he would never reach it!

It may be, with that black despair in his soul, he turned like a wild beast at bay and struck back with such awful force that the blade bit right through Ingulf's steel casque and half an inch into the skull, laying open the old scar of a grim wound he had received years before—where or how he could not remember.

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INGULF went staggering back, and I was about to fire when I saw him recover himself and saw an extraordinary change sweep over his features.

For an instant he stared at the King so dreadfully that the other quailed. The blow which had narrowly missed being his death must have freed some old splinter of bone pressing down from the skull against his brain. As if in that flash of time, instantaneously as a lightning bolt, memory had come back!

In Ingulf's face I saw a look of complete realization of his own identity—of the identity of the man he was fighting: the usurper who had killed his father, as it proved, and would have killed him too. But he had fled, as a boy, across the mountains, with his memory wrecked by that blow on the head from a battle-ax years ago. That was the queer gap in his life—his hiatus. He had fallen in with the slavers who had gone across the desert to the slave-marches of Africa. They had made a fighting-man of him instead of selling him for a slave.

I heard the claymore hiss through the air and saw the King reel—reel and stagger back, dropping his sword.

Ingulf had struck home! The terrific force of the blow clove through helm and skull, and deep into the Red King's brain. He lurched with a dull crash to the foot of the throne—dead!

Ingulf stood gazing at his dead foe with that weird look of complete comprehension in his face, just as the Marquis de Roquemort, with Sherry and the gray old doctor, came up to the throne; and behind them the Princess Phaïma and many more, with Prince Hakon at the head of his victorious officers.

They came trooping up to the marble dais, on which shone a single ray of sunlight through the crimson curtains of the royal alcove whose dead creator would never sleep there again. The bar of light fell across his face. It was strangely cold and austere, as if in slipping off the cords of life he had left behind him the facial hypocrisy, the sensual stare, with the evil he had wrought all his days.

Looking down fixedly at that cold face of his fallen uncle, Prince Hakon muttered half sardonically:

"Dead, at last! One madman less in a mad world, and one more fiend in Hela! Well, though he lived a drunkard, at least he died like a King!"

And he flashed a strange glance at Ingulf. Was it imagination, or had Hakon betrayed his thoughts by a start of recognition? But his features hardened, and once more became triumphant and cold.

CHAPTER XXIV

A KING WHO FOUND HIS THRONE

EVEN time and distance have left that extraordinary scene in the Valkyrian palace still etched vividly in my memory. Ingulf was standing over the dead King, his face ablaze with many emotions. In his hand was the big naked claymore; the sword of the dead and gone Scots adventurer. What a wild "tableau" he made!

The other actors were posed around him—the French marquis and the old savant, the ex-barrister, the comely, regal, dark-eyed girl Phaïma, and the handsome, pallid Yankee widow who had come into the room alone. Others were trooping in through the arched doors: the giant dragoons in mail, with the heroic remnant of the Black Company, gaunt guerrillas of war; and the crowding, jostling archers and men-at-arms.

Prince Hakon or, in fine, King Hakon today—by the grace of the king-maker and his own strong right arm, who had got what he had plotted for at last, stood apart in the foreground, leaning on his red sword and watching Ingulf with a strange expression in his eyes.

Did he suspect that Ingulf was the real King of Valkyria? Did Hakon believe—as I believed—that he was the lineal descendant of Ingulf the Viking? I had no proof of it, though, except the half-meaningless Saga scrawled in the Jotuns' treasure-room some six hundred years ago! And did the gallant but crafty prince—shrewdly suspecting that Ingulf would never be able to prove his royal birth—stifle his conscience and seal his lips with the ignoble thought that the throne he had got for himself was the gift of Odin and therefore his to keep?

If he did, he was no different from other princes of the earth! At least a royal crown was too strong a bait for him—as the king-maker knew.

De Roquemort knew Hakon's heart; he had read him through and through. And with the flush of victory in the significant smile he had flashed at me, he turned to the officers of Hakon's cavalry and

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raised his sword with a gesture of authority.

"Hail to King Hakon of Valkyria!" he cried, and the Jotuns cheered wildly.

HE HAD won! He had set his puppet on the throne of Valkyria, and Leopold's dark Protectorate had triumphed over the cause of Cecil Rhodes. With Leopold's scheme of annexation he, De Roquemort, did not concern himself. It was not he who must reënact the horrors of the Congo.

Perhaps he saw in his mind's eye the fallen fortunes of his House regenerated by the princely reward Leopold must have offered him, and by his share of the Jotuns' hoard! He would take good care to remove the treasure and see it safely packed in panniers, to be slung one on each side of his transport-donkeys, with the jewels which represented so many millions of francs, under his own falcon eyes, and the ingots of gold sewed up in rawhide, ready for the word to march, when the time came.

Yet the Marquis de Roquemort was a man of honor. He would divide the treasure fairly. Gold could not bribe him to break his gentleman's code—the code of his ancestors who had fought under the old Lilies of France. And Leopold, the reader of men, must have won this man with the one bribe that such a man as De Roquemort would accept—a great name.

But I saw the darker side, the other years. I saw, mentally, the gold-mines of Valkyria worked by a once free race sunk to the level of serfs and even worse off than they had ever been during the remorseless reign of the Red King, under Leopold's mercenaries, under the shadow of a foreign fortress bristling with Belgian guns! And in my heart I knew that his idea was wrong—all wrong! How could I prevent it? To me, in the bitterness of that defeat, the one bright gleam in this hopeless situation was the conviction that I had won the love of Norma, and that a return to civilization was now a certainty, though I could never face again the Empire-builder, Cecil Rhodes.

To Sherry the whole thing must have seemed like a glorious romance. He had prevailed upon Alline to marry him—one day, when he returned. To Eric Ivarsson, that grotesque and brave old savant, his future fame among men as the greatest living archeologist seemed assured.

To Ingulf, it meant what? No living man knows. He stood watching Hakon's dark face, with his own as stern and impenetrable as a mask of iron.

Hakon took the salute with a royal dignity as he advanced to the throne he had won like a Roman Consul, through a sea of blood, raising his red sword in answer to the wild cheers of his officers. Mechanically, with the unconscious gesture of a man perfectly familiar with the rôle he had to play, he half parted the crimson curtains behind the dais to let the sunlight shine in the better on his hour of triumph.

But as he moved the curtains there was the sharp, humming twang of a bowstring. He went reeling back, clutching convulsively at a long arrow buried to the feather in his side where the corselet joins the mail, and the red blood began to drip down on the white marble for half a dozen tense seconds like the *tick*, *tick*, *tick* of an invisible clock.

The spectators grew horror-stricken as they saw a spasm pass over Hakon's face. He staggered, strove to clutch the ivory throne, but missed it by an inch. Then he sank dying across the corpse of the Red King.

The Pretender had paid in full for the lie he would have lived if he could; but in the racking throes of death he was to redeem that lie by gasping out the truth. But still the spell held men fast.

INGULF was the first man to make a move. He leaped past the dying Hakon and felled the murderer—Agi the tall archer—the blow splitting the bowman to the chin, ere he could draw another arrow to the head. He was dead before he struck the marble floor.

But even before the archer dropped, I had guessed why he had sped that ruthless shaft. In truth, the deadly motive was not hard to understand. His arrow that struck down the prince was launched by the human combination of fear and revenge.

Fear of that naked sword in Hakon's hand, which the bowman well knew would strike home in the instant of unavoidable discovery; revenge for his fallen master, whom Agi had loved in his own wild, wolfish heart as a boar-hound loves the hand that feeds him.

Well he knew that he had to die, and knew also that Hakon was the man who gained most surely by the King's downfall.

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He would have slain the rest if he could, but Hakon he hated most of all, and took a dark pride in seeing that he never would rule in the Red King's throne-chair, though he had hidden himself behind the curtains for his own safety. Like the other refugees, Agi had been forced to flee by the human law of self-preservation. He had fled there since he could find no better hiding-place; but at the last he had realized the hopelessness of escape, and his savage impulse of vengeance had mastered him.

A cry burst from Hakon's men.

"The King is dead!" But a convulsive movement of the dying Prince Hakon instantly riveted every eye upon him. With a supreme effort he rolled over on his side, and propping himself up painfully on his mailed elbow, slowly turned his fast-glazing eyes and livid, tortured face upon Ingulf, at whom he managed to point at last a shaking finger.

"No!" he gasped out, "the King *lives!* There is the real King—King Ingulf, son of Ulf the Good—last of the Royal House of Valkyria! The usurper poisoned his father with the bane in the mead-cup—his mother went mad—but the boy lived—lived to return—to return and to avenge the past!"

A keen shudder ran through his stalwart frame.

"I pass," he murmured vaguely, "to Hela! See to it that he is set—on the throne—of Valkyria!"

Hakon fell back a corpse.

In the many faces crowding around the dais, I saw a dozen fleeting emotions: amazement, joy, grief, fear and despair, and many other expressions that were indescribable; the most salient one being doubt, as is ever the way where men's motives clash.

And from the Jotuns arose a menacing growl:

"An impostor! A traitor! Who knows? If he is in truth the King, let him put it to the proof—or let him die the death!"

And in an instant, swords were out and men were crowding around him in a ring of fierce faces. Ingulf's steel-gray eyes flashed fire, and he stepped back, whirling the naked sword in the air.

"I am the King!" quoth Ingulf in a voice like the peal of an organ. "And Death flies here! Take care!" And up flashed his fatal claymore.

They recoiled. There was proof enough—if men had but known where to find it—in the royal archives and parchments. But hot heads and wild hearts make a short shrift; and blood might have flowed from it, save for the presence of mind of a gray-haired veteran officer of cavalry who had pushed his way to the front of the crowd. The old Jotun stepped out from the throng and held up his gnarled hand with a shrewd, humorous chuckle.

"Softly!" quoth he. "King's men and game-cocks all! 'Tis soon put to the proof. If he is the son of Ulf my old master—and by Odin's sword, I would swear to those hawk's eyes in a thousand—there will be still on his skin the old scar where I dropped my ax, with the strong mead swimming through my head, at his cradle-side years agone. Doff the gauntlet, King, and let us see thine arm!"

FOR answer, Ingulf drew off the mail gauntlet and tossed it clinking on the marble flags. With a royal gesture he held up his bared arm in the bar of sunlight, and even from where I stood I could plainly make out the mark of a livid white scar, three inches long, standing out on the firm, bronzed skin.

Men craned their heads to look. The old servant of his father, the dead King Ulf, stared with misty eyes. It was enough. As in a wild awaking dream, I heard De Roquemort rap out a French oath between his teeth and heard the Valkyrians' deep, thrilling cry—

"Long live King Ingulf of Valkyria!"

Many voices took up that cry, till it went echoing down the crowded corridors. There followed a scene of singular confusion: mingled cries of wonder, joy, triumph, laughter and sorrow, pity for the dead Hakon, plaudits for the living King Ingulf. But in all this uproar the beautiful Valkyrian girl Phaïma still stood staring motionless and horror-stricken at the contorted features of her ill-starred half-brother, as if she had read in them something the others could not see.

"Dead!" she said mechanically, half to herself. "Dead in his hour of triumph—never to sit upon the throne he won! Lifeless and still with a cruel arrow driven through his brave heart, never to throb again!" A smothered sigh burst from Phaïma's ashen lips. "Cold in death," she quivered, "with his honor unstained by a living lie. May the gods grant him peace."

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She swayed slightly and shuddered as if some terrible presentiment burned in her dulled and tortured brain.

"Ah, Valkyria!" she said in her rich, deep, broken voice. "So soon to perish and pass away! Fallen—and all her white beauty crumbled to dead and blackened ruins deep down in the crystal depths where the wildfowl wheel and cry above the blue waters that hide forever their mighty secret of Valkyria's fallen greatness—never to know the light of day again!"

Ingulf started, and caught the girl's arm.

"You are dreaming, fair Queen!"

She looked at him rather wildly.

"Queen! You too are dreaming, my lord!" she said coldly. "I am but a slave in the hollow of your royal hand, and not a Queen."

"You are my Queen, lady," quoth Ingulf with quiet determination. "I will have no other."

I saw the girl tremble violently and gaze up timidly into his calm, steady gray eyes that seemed to burn down into her thoughts—then her composure broke. A red blush swept across her pale, olive cheeks; and in an instant the tears were rolling slowly down them.

But Ingulf, with a royal smile lighting up his strong features, very gently took Phaïma's wet cheeks between both his hands, and turned her face up, then deliberately kissed her on the lips.

"'Tis a trick I have learned from the white Jarls!" quoth he to the girl half humorously.

The Marquis de Roquemort stood watching them with a diamond-edged smile on his lips.

"*Sacre bleu!*" he swore ironically. "So I have made another King—and he has already found a Queen! *Kismet*, as the Arabs say, I win, after all!"

"Not yet!" I retorted crushingly, tapping him with an emphatic finger. "I am prime minister now, so you lose. The king-maker must bow to the empire-builder. Belgium came a cropper with Hakon the Pretender, poor devil! Your machine-guns are silenced. Thank God, if ever another European sets foot in Valkyria it will be under the flag of England and Cecil Rhodes!"

He stared at me with swift comprehension in his eyes, as Ingulf II of Valkyria, hand in hand with the Princess Phaïma, advanced up the dais to his strangely regained inheritance. He set her in the ivory throne and stood erect, facing a thunder-storm of applause that rolled through the palace again and again, ere it died away.

The girl was smiling and blushing happily now—after the way of a woman. And obviously, the King's union with the last of the Valkyrian royalty touched a popular chord in the hearts of all factions, for it consolidated the interests of the kingdom.

A RED flush burned in De Roquemort's cheek, and for a moment he turned away. When he faced us again it was by some iron effort of the will that he bowed low, in his grand courtier fashion, to the King he had not meant to make. He stepped closer to me and said in a low voice:

"You are cleverer than I thought. You have let me fight your battles beautifully to the end! For you I have accommodatingly preserved a distressed lady and unearthed a giant's hoard—if you live to spend it. I have built you a stair of gold to the castle of love! *Et moi*," he added absently, "what matter if Leopold's coronet must go begging for another crest than mine? Somebody's bubbles will burst! To play out the comedy, there is left a little affair of honor—pistols, was it not?"

I started. He had caught me napping once more! I said stiffly—

"As you like, M. de Roquemort."

"Shall we say ten minutes after sunset, behind the fountains in the courtyard?" he suggested. "The light will be perfect then."

I nodded. He spun around on his heel with a bow, and walked away inscrutably, a set smile on his lips, through the ring of mystified, cheering men-at-arms—cheering for the King whom most of them had never seen before—and down the long hall to where a shapely woman waited for him with a splendid smile that was perhaps a better reward than any coronet of this world.

It was Mrs. Rountree.

So Leopold had promised him a dukedom as the price of his success! If he had won, he might have been elevated to the dignity of a prince. Sometimes when I think of how gallantly he fought against inhuman odds, of the high nobility he had shown in a base cause, I have felt sorry that he lost.

King Ingulf II was speaking with the ring of authority in his deep voice.

"Soldiers of Valkyria," he said, "I give

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you a new law—peace and safety. To whomsoever breaks the King's Rede, beware! Prince or pauper, he shall die! To the soldiers of the dead usurper, who fought in ignorance, I give free pardon. And to you, Avar the Thirsty—" he turned to the veteran officer of cavalry whose presence of mind had quelled the riot—"I give command of my army. See that you become henceforth Avar the Sober, and do the deeds of a man! Now bury the dead and cleanse the city. But stay! To the Black Priesthood whose blight has lain long on Valkyria, I decree death—and no quarter. Go! See to it that they are hemmed in and killed and their creed abolished forever!"

Avar bowed low and went about his grim errand.

A murmur of mingled joy, relief, astonishment and horror ran around the hall; then silence fell, which King Ingulf broke.

"Guards," quoth he, pointing to the mailed corpse of Hakon the Pretender, "he who lies dead was a brave and gallant soldier. Bury him like a Prince of Valkyria! But first bury the usurper as a common felon, and his dead henchman with him. Take them away!"

THE hall was cleared. We watched the somewhat awed assemblage breaking up; and from the windows overlooking the square saw King Ingulf's couriers riding out swiftly from the city's gates, bearing to the Northern Province the news that Prince Hakon was dead with the Red King, and the House of Ulf was strangely restored to the throne of Valkyria.

Then I advanced to the dais, with Sherry and the old savant, Eric Ivarsson.

"Long live King Ingulf II!" I said.

"Aye," quoth Ingulf, "King by an inch!"

"And every inch a King!" I threw in readily.

He laughed like a Viking in a Saga.

"You shall have the Jotuns' hoard for that word. I will remember what you have done, Jarls. And I will not forget the little game-cock of the Black Company! In Valkyria, some day, men will tell to their children how he and his held the keep against the Red King's army."

He turned away. A woman's voice behind me said in a tone of relief:

"Alan! Thank God you are safe!" and I knew it was Norma's voice. She caught my arm as she came up breathlessly through the dispersing crowd of soldiers and budding courtiers. I gazed at her startled face with vague dismay. I had recalled suddenly De Roquemort's inexorable words, "To play out the comedy, there is left a little affair of honor!" and read in her frightened eyes, whose big dark pupils were wildly dilated, that she had already guessed the truth. Had she overheard, or had her woman's instinct divined?

She gave one look in my face and her own blanched swiftly.

"Tell me!" she quivered. "Is it *true*, Alan? You are going to fight a duel with that man? If you love me, tell me the truth!"

"Come with me, Norma," I said mechanically. "This is no place for you."

We went into one of the marble anterooms alone—the room where I awoke to see the Royal Guards annihilated by De Roquemort's guns on the great stair.

My first words to her were:

"Who has told you this? Not the marquis! He is a fine gentleman, it is not his way. As for me, I would have spared you this suspense till it was all over."

"No!" she stammered. "Not the marquis—I overheard. I saw him leave Mrs. Rountree for a moment and drop back to say to the black-bearded Portuguese audibly, 'A duel at sunset with the Englishman. Pistols—have them loaded!' Then he rejoined her and they went out arm in arm. Merciful heaven! She does not know—and she loves him! But oh, Alan, surely you will give up this senseless duel? Surely you need not fight that brave man for the futile chimera men call honor!"

But I bowed my head silently. A moment afterward, I pronounced—

"It is the only way."

Norma swayed suddenly and turned white as the marble walls.

"Alan!" she gasped. "You shall not do this mad, wicked, reckless thing! That man is desperate and undone, the iron has pierced his soul. He has saved all our lives a hundred times—and this is his reward, to lose, through his own nobility, all that he has fought for and all but grasped. No!" she said shuddering. "Abandon your purpose itself first, Alan, and let us go back, you and I, to England—somewhere—and forget it all!"

Her words pierced my heart; rang in my brain. They had a tremendous appeal, the sure conviction that we *could* go back; back

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to England, or to America, rich with the Jotuns' treasure, and richer still in love—we two—and let the mad world wag on in Africa in its own blind, futile fashion, as it probably would do after all!

Would I have decided differently if I had it all to live over again?

Yes—and no! For all that Norma has been to me, it was not her strength, woman's beauty of body and soul that must have mastered even conscience and sent honor flying to the four winds—it was her weakness. And yet to break the heart of the empire-builder? No.

All the dogged will of the Devonshire breed burst through the crust of the gentleman-lover.

"You are wrong, my girl," I said to her in a swift-flowing torrent of words. "You don't see. Back of it all, big destinies are working—race against race; the cause of England and Cecil Rhodes against Leopold. You don't realize it all, Norma! This is the real reckoning. Once for all, today settles that fight—and fight the Frenchman I will!"

Norma burst into tears. But she was beaten, and she knew it. She had met, for the first time in her life, one of the few terrible problems of this world which a woman's beauty can not conquer, nor a woman's wit turn aside!

Down in the white courtyard, which had been cleared of the dead, and the desecrating crimson stains washed away into the thirsty earth, I could see two familiar figures strolling slowly past the clear flashing fountains, under the blue African sky; and both heads were nodding very close together—the raven-haired and the gray. They were the French soldier of fortune and the Yankee widow who did not know.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FALL OF VALKYRIA

KING INGULF II of Valkyria had a royal wedding at midday, and Hakon the Pretender a royal burial when the red sun sank. The beautiful Phaïma blushed and laughed at the wedding, and well nigh cried her pretty eyes out at the funeral—being a woman, and torn between love and sorrow. She had what the press paragraphers describe as "an emotional day."

At high noon, in the white palace of the Valkyrian kings, I had been imperiously summoned to the throne-room, where I found my ex-henchman, with Phaïma, my fellow-adventurers, and a numerous concourse of people waiting impatiently; and with them a white-haired servant of Odin; half poet-bard and the other half pagan priest.

He had appeared from some musty corner of Valkyria—much as a solitary bloom of the vivid wild gorse sometimes thrusts up its lonely head to the sun amid the pallid fungus-growth of the fens. He had stalked out from enforced seclusion as soon as he had learned the news of the fall of the Black Priesthood and the restoration of the House of Ulf.

In an aged, metallic monotone, with barbarian gestures a thousand years old, the priest began droning out into his white, long beard, that would have done for a Druid in a tragedy, the few simple words which linked that royal pair. At the very last instant, by a curiously human oversight, it was found that the bridal couple lacked a ring, and even that ancient bard was helpless!

So the Kentucky widow, Mrs. Rountree, contributed a shining golden band—a wedding ring she seemed glad to give away—smiling slightly into the falcon eyes of the Marquis de Roquemort with a significance which could not be mistaken. Presently the wedding-cup went around the hall; the concourse broke up, having cheered till the great room echoed to the roof with their applauding voices. Clearly King Ingulf's first royal act had been both politic and popular.

Norma stood watching this extraordinary scene; her face pale and distraught, as if with a vague prevision of coming evil. She seemed sunk in dreams as Sherry and Alline came up to us, arm in arm.

"How perfectly glorious!" the Southern girl purred rapturously. "All this—in the nineteenth century! To think that your mad Viking has turned out to be a savage King! And to think that all the while he has been making effective love to a semi-barbaric Queen! What a hit it will all make in 'Persons I Have Met!' "

Here Sherry groaned abysmally but was crushingly snubbed. Alline was bubbling gayly.

"My memoirs, Mr. Severn, can be safely booked for a 'Best Seller.' They will run

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into many editions and be translated into correct Londonese, and Billingsgate-and-Scotch. Tragedy, pathos, satire—and scuttlefuls of gore!"

She cast a look of witheringly sweet scorn upon the enamored Sherry, who was attempting feebly to put in—

"But—er—we are going to be married first, you know, before you write them!"

Then she continued calmly:

"Dr. Eric Ivarsson is a perfect brick. He has actually consented to write the preface, and sign it with nearly all of the alphabet after his name. And the reviewers will all say: 'A new and fascinating volume of African adventures from the pen of the well-known globe-trotter, Miss Alline Buckerton, of Covington, Kentucky., U. S. A. Marooned in an extinct crater in Central Africa, with the late expedition of the Marquis de Roquemort, this determined young woman——'"

"Too dashed determined," groaned Sherry, but the girl paid no heed. She had checked herself suddenly, catching sight of Norma's tortured face. It was ashen, and the English girl was swaying as if with a vertigo.

"Forgive me!" Alline exclaimed, and caught swiftly at her arm. "You are ill, Norma—I did not know. Come away at once. A glass of wine——"

Norma gathered herself together and followed quietly, as if dazed. At the door of the room she turned back and gave me from the shadow a long, silent look that went to my heart. Then she passed out.

Sherry stared at me. But I drew him aside into the almost deserted corridor. The crowd of courtiers had swooped down upon the wedding feast.

"Steady, my boy," I said quietly. "I have got a bit of ill news to break."

And in a dozen words I told him of the duel. He whistled below his breath.

"So the Frenchman means to play trumps to the bitter end," he said. "Well, he has a perilous reputation. You remember what Rhodes said, 'A ruined gamester with the devil's courage!' I am afraid it is too late to mend a cast shoe, Alan. You must be quick as lightning and cool as steel—or he will kill you!"

"In which case," I said in a steady voice, "I shall make you my heir, as my sole kinsman." He shuddered.

"One thing more," I said, and I handed him a long envelope bearing the seal of Cecil Rhodes, which I had carried for so many months. "I commit these papers into your hands. You are aware what they contain. If I die, you are to take any steps deemed best by yourself and Dr. Eric Ivarsson, in behalf of England. If I live, there will be no need of treaties till another day."

"Keep a stiff upper lip, old chap," he said, and went away with the grants in his hand to look for the doctor.

I TURNED back to the throne-room and joined the gay, boisterous throng of feasters. Come what would, I was determined to carry the affair off coolly, without heroics. Yet my brain was buzzing with dark thoughts as I went in and sat down at the banquet-board, as I had sat upon a day at the Red King's trenchers, nodding stiffly to the man across the table—De Roquemort!

To hide my surprise I poured out a goblet of the strong red wine and was about to raise it to my lips when his gesture arrested me in the act.

"In your shoes, Captain Severn," said the marquis meaningly, "I would not drink that wine. It is far too strong for a steady nerve." He paused absently. "But as you English fire-eaters have no nerves to unstring, permit me to drink with you, to our little *coup de main* at sunset!"

He drank on his feet, bowed blandly and walked away strollingly, his heel-taps dying out like a drum-roll.

I gazed at his receding military back—puzzled. He had given me some good advice, with the odd and exalted foreign chivalry of his incomprehensible character. He would take no advantage: if I drank, so would he! Yet he meant to kill me. He was gone. I began to eat some food mechanically, taking his hint about the wine.

At last I looked at my watch. It was three o'clock. Only three hours more, perhaps, of life. It was a weird, new sensation. I had discovered how condemned men feel in their last hours on earth.

Time is a thing that either gallops or crawls, as a man's mind happens to be full or empty. Mine was abrim; so time set a reeling steeplechase to the sunset. Those last hours staggered by like dreams. There was not time enough to live them in. For

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the first and last time in my life, I steered clear of Norma. I wanted to keep my fighting nerve. So I had wisely resolved not to risk again that uncomfortable battery of her accusing eyes.

Framed in the tall doorway beyond, I caught sight of Sherry again, and old Eric Ivarsson. They paused and held a muttered exchange of words, jerking their thumbs toward me. A moment after I saw them beckon. Then a diversion occurred. The King stood up and there was a general movement of the crowd to the doors which we followed.

Presently I was standing with bared head in the gaping crowd at Prince Hakon's burial, with King Ingulf II and a curious company of fawning courtiers who, as is the way of man, now worshiped the new star that had arisen in their barbaric heaven. They had opened an enormous manhole in the limestone courtyard, many feet out from the stair. A garrulous, aged bystander informed me that all of the Valkyrian Kings lay buried there, under the giant keep they had reared.

In the fading sun-blaze I saw a body wrapped in a glittering sheet of lead being received by shadowy hands upstretched out of the hole. Then I heard a single, pealing volley fired by all that was left of the Black Company over Hakon's grim grave. That was Raoul de Roquemort's final tribute to the Pretender's heart of oak.

TEN minutes after, the courtyard was empty—all save four who waited until the crowd had melted away.

Of these four, I was one. The other three were De Roquemort, Sherry, and the dark-faced Portuguese who came up carrying a black morocco pistol-case under his arm. It had a silver clasp with the monogram of the marquis; it looked as if it had played a part in other duels, in what lands and in what *affaires d'honneur* I had no idea.

"Shall we say fifteen paces apart?" I heard Sherry say to the Portuguese adventurer.

The marquis was standing a few feet away and out of ear-shot. He paid no attention, seeming sunk in reveries.

"The right distance, Señor," was the reply. "These pistols throw a shade high."

He approached me with the black case open.

"Take your choice, Señor Severn," he said courteously.

As in a dream, I noted that the two gleaming things on black plush looked very handsome and very deadly. Both were pearl-mounted, exactly alike, and apparently of foreign make, for they had a peculiar upward hook to the inside of the grip, to afford a better hand-hold.

Coolly enough, remembering that it is ever the fashion of Englishmen to play the man best at the last, I weighed one of the weapons in my hand, absently admiring its beautiful poise and balance. Then I put it back.

"No, Mr. Torres," I said, "I prefer my own—a Colt's." And I took it out of its holster and threw the cylinder, making certain that it was loaded in all six chambers.

"Then place your man," he said to Sherry. "Now—while the light is good."

The Marquis turned around with an abrupt, foreign gesture. His face was a singular study.

"Captain Severn," he threw in, "before we proceed, I have a word to say. I regret that this must be the end. Under other circumstances, I should avoid this quarrel with a brave gentleman whose point of view I can not in honor recognize. You will recall perfectly my position? Destiny, not Raoul de Roquemort, arranges all the pieces today and sweeps the board!"

"Valkyria will not hold us both, Raoul," I said.

"So," he went on evenly, "one of us takes a trip through the Dark Gates! The other goes back to the world—to fame and wealth of a Monte Cristo. If you are the unlucky one, I offer you the oath of a De Roquemort that your share of the Viking's gold shall go to your heirs, untouched. *Voila!* it is well packed, that gold, monsieur, and all those jewels, to guard against an accident. If I fall, *mon ami*, you will be so good as to make over my part of the treasure to *la tres belle Americaine*, Mrs. R-r-rountree."

He added, smiling mirthlessly:

"Come, I trust you, monsieur, and your English face has written on it that you trust me. Let us get it over." He selected a pistol from the case. "We will fire together at the count of three."

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The sun was going down. Never yet, I thought, had its mellow rays shone on a madder sight than this mad duel for a lost land. Then at the metal-lipped hail from the Portuguese, "In your places, gentlemen? . . . Ready!" I stiffened instinctively and brought down my weapon steadily with an arm set like steel, until the barrel covered an ornament pinned with a bit of red ribbon on the Frenchman's breast that gleamed in the sun rays.

Instantaneously I guessed that it was the Cross of the Legion of Honor which he had earned, God knows by what gallant deed of bravery or on what desperate field, and wore for the first time I had seen it—fully aware of the danger he ran by having so conspicuous a mark pinned on his coat; but preferring to die with it, if he had to die, under that immortal symbol of France.

The voice of the Portuguese blared out—"One!"

My barrel came to a dead rest on the fiery Cross.

"Two!"

I say it with genuine remorse and with no wish to boast, I was a dead shot and certain that I had him—when a new voice roared:

"Gentlemen, you are under arrest. On the charge of breaking the King's Peace!"

At the same instant the hand of old Eric Ivarsson struck up my pistol and a line of armed guards filed into the courtyard from the doors at the side of the stair-foot. Behind the guards I saw my one-time retainer, Ingulf the King, his stern face now dark with wrath. I was disarmed.

"Guards," said the King ominously, "put those four men in irons. They are mad to brawl here in the palace-yard on my wedding-eve! Though they be Jarls of Valkyria, they shall learn that I rule here, and what it is to break the King's Rede!"

I WAS crestfallen. A brace of burly archers took charge of me, and their comrades laid rough hands on Sherry. The marquis gave up his pistol in bitter silence and submitted, his head sunk forward slightly on his chest in thought. Had he resisted, a dozen shafts might have found their mark. The Valkyrians held life cheap. The King's word was law.

Eric abruptly glued his watery, cold gray eye on me.

"A more serious charge than you think," he said *sotto voce*, and my face fell as I harked to him. "My dear Severn, kings are kings, you know, all the world over. You'll be lucky if you can come out of this mess with a whole skin. Nothing short of exile. You can't do this sort of thing in a king's front yard——"

He never finished the rest. A ghastly looking figure of a man came lurching and reeling through the broken gates and staggered across the courtyard like a man drunken or spent—a man whose red-rimmed, blood-shot eyes, haunted by fear, and palsied features I had difficulty in recognizing as the lineaments of him who had once been Avar the Thirsty and had become in a day Avar the Sober, general of the Valkyrian army.

He strove painfully to speak, but no articulate or coherent words issued from his dry lips—only senseless mouthings, like the gibberings of an ape.

"Speak out, man!" cried King Ingulf. "What ails thee?"

"By the Hound of Hrymir! O King!" he gasped out at last. "Flee swiftly, with those that are dear to thee! Valkyria is fallen! Aye, the accursed priests have fired the reservoirs and from a hundred earth-caves the fires of Hela have leaped forth! *Look!*"

He pointed, shuddering, to the square below.

A terrific, roaring sheet of awful flame rose suddenly, almost to the dusky, twilight sky. It lit up weirdly for one breathless flash of time the gigantic bronze figure of the sculptured Philosopher in the Square, till it stood out brilliantly in bold relief against the white line of noble colonnades and majestic fanes beyond, like some superhuman genii, clothed in a spectral halo not of earth.

There was a dull, shattering explosion—a rending roar of upheaved masonry, and the statue fell, to disappear forever into a yawning chasm of hissing flames. Over the spot where the Colossus had fallen drifted sullenly a trailing fleet of murky, sulphurous smoke-wreaths that swirled lower and lower, down, down over it all, like monstrous vultures from the next world closing on their prey.

Then with a yell like a lost soul—beating his breast in frenzied haste as if his lungs were bursting for air—Avar the Jotun

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turned toward us his convulsed face, over which a ghastly, greenish pallor was swiftly creeping, and lurched to the King's feet—a corpse.

For an instant every man stood petrified with horror. Then the appalled guards released us and made a frantic rush for the gates, each bent solely upon saving himself in the general catastrophe. There was no longer heed among them for the authority of kings or gods, the instinct of self-preservation was strongest of all.

We were free. They fought like madmen for escape at the narrow stone arch, trampling one another underfoot in their wolfish haste. Then the courtyard was empty but for ourselves, the King, and half a dozen of his officers who had stood their ground.

Señor Torres, in his dismay, dropped the pistol-case at my feet and fled stumbling in the falling dusk to the barracks where the Arabs were quartered. But they needed no arousing; they were already swarming out like a hunting-pack from their kennels, as men do who have learned to meet and grapple the unforeseen. But they were bewildered, awed, by that unholy glare out of the tropic dusk.

De Roquemort retained his iron composure. He wheeled and rapped out a curt command to El Zanek, the Arab, who had suddenly appeared as if from the earth. Then he dashed up the shadowy stair.

That old man remained cool as ice, though the fires of avarice inside him were fierce as the hungry flames. He yelped to his scattered pack and they heeded him—even then. In a trice they fell to work at his bidding, looking like black gnomes from the underworld in the crimson reflection from the sky, against which their gaunt figures stood out plainly.

Looking back once from the top of the great stair as I rushed after Ingulf and the Valkyrian officers, that brief, wild vision of the luridly lit courtyard, the Arabs, and the burning, smoke-wreathed city below, was photographed upon my memory forever.

ALL that, you will understand, got under way, transpired and ended in half a dozen breathless minutes; though it seems long enough in the telling. Afterward I found that while their invincible Giaour was inside, the Arabs had stoically continued loading the Maxims on two of the string of transport donkeys, which they had led out coolly from the palace stables; burdening the others with the wicker panniers and raw-hide bags which contained the Jotuns' treasure.

Deus ex machina! The Giaour's mastery of men and his almost hypnotic vigilance; his military tactics of providing a retreat behind every advance, which was a part of his soldier's genius and of his graphic imagination, had triumphed once more, even in the face of a cataclysm which could destroy a city.

As for me, my first thought had been for Norma. Stopping only an instant to pick up the pistol which Señor Torres had cast away in his fright—for I realized the value of such a weapon in a crisis where men might turn to wild beasts—I had followed De Roquemort into the palace, which was plunged in shadow. I dashed straight to Norma's room, whose location I knew as well as I knew the ground plan of my own rooms in the long stone wing of Frau Van Sælm's rambling old house in Johannesburg.

Bursting into the room I saw a knot of huddled white figures staring from the windows down at the burning city, over which a gigantic trail of smoke from the awakening volcano was rolling sullenly, with a blood-red glow of flame in its heart. Into the shadowy room great flakes of calcined ashes were drifting slowly. I felt them upon my fingers—and I understood!

The slumbering Titan in the crater, shaken from sleep by the terrific subterranean gas-explosions, had come to life at last! The volcano was sending out its silent advance-guard of ruin. From the distance I heard the crash of falling buildings, toppling one after another to utter destruction, as the crackling flames burst out from their foundations, lapping pitilessly around the stately, fallen fanes and broken pillars, and leaping right up to the dark sky.

Then a blood-freezing sound, like the death-cries uttered by countless voices, was borne back faintly to my ears from the doomed city.

A woman screamed. Then from the knot of frightened figures by the window, Norma's pale face emerged.

"Alan", she said, "thank God you are not dead!"

In a moment I had her in my arms. But only for a moment; for in the next De

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Roquemort was in the room, followed by Sherry and the King himself.

"Get what you must have, Norma," I said, "and prepare yourself for a journey. The city is doomed. Be swift!"

Phaïma glided from the shadows. She put her white arms around Ingulf's great shoulders, with a gesture remarkable for its unutterable love and despair.

"Valkyria is fallen, my King!" she said brokenly. "Perhaps you will forget Phaïma and go back with the white Jarls to a world where this one will seem like a horrible vision—a dream that never was!"

But Ingulf spoke out royally. "Nay, Phaïma, that will I not. Never will I desert my people in the hour of misfortune—the white Jarls go back alone! One day a new Valkyria shall kiss the sun, and above it the Valkyries shall wheel their pale horses as of old—but not here! Come away with me, my Queen, to safety—while there is time to flee."

IN THE doorway appeared old Eric Ivarsson's warped features against the ruddy glare from the windows.

"Away!" he mumbled. "Quick! I have got gear and guns!"

Getting clear of the palace we found a disordered mob of archers, courtiers and King's scullions huddled in the courtyard, kept at bay by the menacing, yellow face of El Zanek who held the gateway with a drawn saber as the Arabs heaved up their packs. With true Arab cunning, he had provisioned them warily for a fortnight's march with cold venison and dried dates. He had seen to the Giaour's dunnage, even to the oil lamps. As for loot, they had already swept through the palace like Attila's Huns; but woman-like, Phaïma had saved the crown jewels of Valkyria, days before.

"Trek!"

To the old cry we began the maddest march that ever the Valkyrian stars shone down upon. Our long cavalcade—the scared women grouped with the royal attendants behind our vanguard—filed across the deserted drawbridge, whose warders had fled long since. The water had risen for some strange reason, as I marked, and was lapping and gurgling madly over the trembling timbers of the bridge.

Steering wide of the ruined square, where the flames were now leaping almost to the shadowy sky, we plunged into a narrow side thoroughfare that was little more than a footpath used mostly by wine-sellers and fruit-vendors from the quays.

It brought us out at last upon the dim embankment of the canal. Here, too, I noticed that the water was rising mysteriously. It was already within nine inches of the low stone bank, and from it issued an ominous, bubbling, sucking sound whose cause I was at a loss to comprehend. The canal here had been generally half choked by all the sluggish sewage that it collected from the long southern slopes of the city, before it turned off under a great white aqueduct set level with the streets, to discharge its foul dark tide into the broad river which broke through the eastern wall of the crater.

The river was the only outlet from the blue lake lying north of the city, whose ten-mile-long expanse of deep water was hidden from our eyes by the darkness. There seemed to be a great commotion in that quarter, though we had no inkling of what was happening.

Then vividly Phaïma's wild words re-echoed ominously in my memory, word for word.

"Valkyria!" her horror-stricken, haunting voice had said. "So soon to perish and pass away! Fallen! . . . and all her white beauty crumbled to dead and blackened ruins deep down in the crystal depths! . . . where the wild fowl wheel and cry above the blue waters that hide forever their mighty secret of Valkyria's fallen greatness—never to know the light of day again!"

What did the girl mean?

Did she guess that one day the giant forces of the earth would awake and overwhelm Valkyria? Did she know that the crater was but asleep?

With the volcano feeding the gas-mains which honeycombed the whole city, how easy it was for a malignant mind to cause the destruction of Valkyria! How simple a thing it was to break through the artificial crust of masonry—to cast down in those depths one blazing torch and light the fires of hell!

When that thin line of embankments which, like the dykes of the Scheldt in Holland, chained the river in its bed was once undermined by fire, it would crumble like

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cardboard and let loose the waters of the lake upon the doomed city. Fire and flood! What a fearful foe either was alone, what a terrible pair together!

AMID the dull crash of toppling structures and the loud crackling roar of the leaping flames we reached the wide causeway leading to the aqueduct and hurried across it toward the city's gates, now not more than two hundred yards beyond. But as we gained the highest part of the bridge I paused for breath and looked back.

A shadowy, tall figure enveloped in a long priest's robe appeared, running with great bounds down the main artery from the square.

Almost at his heels sped a soldier with drawn sword. His mail cuirass and upraised weapon caught the red flash of the flames—it was one of the King's officers who pursued the priest like Fate, recognizing the author of Valkyria's fall and grimly bent on fulfilling Ingulf's order, even in the hour of destruction.

On came the hunted priest till barely twenty yards separated him from the white causeway; and as he came nearer the flames flared up brilliantly all around him, and I recognized his ghastly face and skeleton figure—it was the Arch Priest Fangari!* Under the influence of revenge and despair he had fired the huge gas-reservoirs in the square; but the effect had been too swift and appalling for even his dark genius to outwit, his own mad act had cut him off from escape.

On he came, on, on—with the tall figure of the Valkyrian officer rushing behind him like Nemesis. On—until I could see his convulsed face plainly in the glare of the flames.

But he never reached the aqueduct. Just in front of him a frightful sheet of fire abruptly shot up to the sky. The stone pavement crumbled beneath his feet, there was a muffled explosion, and with a scream that rang discordantly in my memory long afterward he vanished. He had fallen into that fiery furnace of his own setting—and that was the end of him.

Then the sullen smoke-canopy rolled down again, and the long, ghostly wreaths of ashes and vapor drifted between, and I never knew the fate of the soldier. Perhaps he perished with the priest. Holding Norma by the hand in the darkness, I stumbled on mechanically, behind the spectral forms of the donkeys and horses and the shadowy shapes of the Arabs.

Presently we had passed out of the silent, deserted gates which were wide ajar, and reached the higher level of the roadway winding up to the dim line of the cliff-wall. Our fleeing cavalcade had joined the endless stream of refugees from the burning city, where many thousands of its inhabitants had been crushed in the ruins of their falling houses, or suffocated in that earthly Inferno they had lived above so long.

I was witnessing the exodus of a people; but only the pitiful remnant, for Valkyria had been as populous as the old-world cities by the Euphrates. Phaïma's strange prophecy had come true.

From the lofty roadway I turned and gazed back at the desolated city. It was the last time I ever saw Valkyria. I saw through the blood-red glow of wildly tossing flames the dim, Titanic outlines of the great fortress still looming tall and ghostly at the city's blazing heart; but flames were bursting out at last under its massive foundations, and the palace of the Valkyrian kings would never kiss the sunrise. Behind me like a shadow King Ingulf was gazing back stonily.

"It is doomed," he said hoarsely, "and I am homeless! Once more I am 'Ingulf the Wanderer!' Valkyria is fallen forever. Well, Jarl, I won it for a day! And by Odin's sword, I am still the King!

"You return alone, Baas. I stay here with my fallen race. Forget those rough words of mine ere I stopped the brawl in the court. I said them but to save your life and that of the little game-cock from overseas, whom I loved for his lion heart. Think of Ingulf the Viking sometimes, my gallant English friend. Farewell!"

I wrung his mailed hand and turned away.

HE WAS gone. In the distance I fancied I could see a long white wall of water rushing down upon the fallen city. The deep waters of the lake, freed by the volcanic convulsions, were rapidly closing over its ruins with a sullen roar like some antedeluvian monster devouring its prey.

*Fangari is an old Norse name in the Iceland Sagas. Other names in the narrative will be found to have a Scandinavian orgin though they sound African.

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In the darkness affrighted clouds of wildfowl were already wheeling and hovering over its site, which was being turned into an immense swamp; and explorers would find no trace of the once mighty city, beyond a few colossal ruins higher up on the flank of the mountain. The old master-artisans who had conceived the city in the crater and invented the means of lighting it were all dead; and Valkyria, like Babylon, Nineveh and Carthage, had fallen and passed away from the face of the earth.

All those dim glimpses of Fate and bitter thoughts passed like some dark fantasmagoria. I was trying to make Norma understand that we were safe. I had, too, the necessity of supporting her trembling form, of consoling her at the parting with Phaïma who was sobbing out her heart. And when De Roquemort came up and tapped me on the shoulder, I was startled and shaken.

His expression was changed. Somehow his face looked strangely friendly, in the glow of the oil lamp he held in his hand. Suddenly he set it down. I was astounded to see him smile buoyantly and offer me his hand. His eyes were brilliant, yet almost sad. I think that in the destruction of Hakon in his hour of triumph he had perceived the finger of God. In his keen, clever way, he had perhaps weighed those considerations; and though he would never admit defeat, his code of life had been lived up to. He had succeeded so far as man may oppose the will of the Almighty.

"Always," he said as our clasp met, "your England has won from the world. *Helas!* . . . It is Destiny, so we need not quarrel, you and I. We are friends, I hope, until death. Sacred name of a coachman, my friend, but there is nothing left to wrangle over!"

There was nothing, he was right. There was not even anything to annex. The cataclysm had wiped the slate clean, and in this again Raoul de Roquemort, the adventurer who had never acknowledged a force superior to his own hands and brain, perceived the finger of God. Of his brave Black Company barely enough remained to form a safe escort and to get the treasure out to the coast. To him the fall of Valkyria brought neither success nor defeat. To Ingulf it meant a reversion to primitive conditions.

We began to ascend the roadway to the cliffs, waving a final farewell to the sea of straining faces, among whom Ingulf's gigantic figure stood motionless, gazing back at the crimson glare on the sky.

CLIMBING to the top of the roadway, just as dawn was breaking, we made the discovery that some frightful subterranean explosion of gas, as the volcano "back-fired," had made a huge gap in the cliff. There was no longer any need to brave the horrors of the passage through the crater's wall, for the road lay open, though it was not a road that any sane being would care to travel twice.

The fearful force of the explosion had blown a tremendous chasm in the cliff-wall. Thousands of feet down its blackened sides there glowed and glimmered dreadfully like an enormous ruby eye a lake of molten fire, whose awful brink was not more than half a dozen yards in a lateral direction from the narrow ledge of riven rock which we must follow to pass across to the comparatively safe lava-slopes beyond.

There was no semblance left of the devilish, weird skull-face. It had vanished as if its portent had been fulfilled. But strewn all over the basalt rocks we found a very curious collection of human bones thrown up from the pit. Among them was the gigantic skeleton of an Ape-man calcined clean by the volcanic gas—the sight of which made Dr. Ivarsson's face suddenly blanch to a sickly gray. He stood staring down at that uncanny Thing in silence for a full minute.

"Ape-man or Troglodyte," he said solemnly, "God knows what it was, and nature had cast it off. What use to draw an analogy between that extraordinary skeleton and the remains existing of the Neanderthal man of a past age? Yet that flat, monstrous skull is the same. The many marks of teeth on those *human* bones point to one of the great carnivora—man; for the anthropoid ape is a vegetarian. But as we can not take that Thing back to the world, in our extremity, it is idle to talk of a theory open to question. The skeleton may belong to another period.

"Or it may have been a gorilla, introduced deliberately by the priests, by way of a personal devil in their earthly hell. The huge apes of Africa roam over a vast range. Again, those bones may have been gnawed by jackals, which had some way of getting into the pit. But as for me, I do not be-

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lieve it." He paused. "There is the horror that haunted poor Ibrahim . . . a horror such as the world never saw."

Shuddering, we turned away and started across the cliff, leading the unwilling beasts and slowly threading our way around the ragged brink of that appalling chasm. An hour later we were safely over the cliff-wall and halted on the sloping field of lava-clinker to eat breakfast. Then we trekked.

THE Jotuns' treasure kept on taking its long toll of human lives. To tell of our long and perilous march to the coast seems quite useless here. After many weeks of forced marches we arrived at Shirati, in German East Africa on the shores of Lake Victoria. Except for losing four of the Black Company from fever, three more who straggled unwisely in the course of a running fight with the Nandi tribe, and two others while fording a broad, deep river swollen by the tropic rains, where one of the donkeys, laden with two of the great golden basins, was also swept away by the swift current and lost with its precious burden, we reached Shirati without mishap to the Europeans in our company.

But of the sixty Swahilis who had trekked with De Roquemort from Beira there remained nine haggard-faced men, all steel nerve and sinew, the survival of the fittest.

At Shirati we had the good luck to fall in with my old acquaintance, Rupert of Pless, that Austrian Prince who had trekked with me in the old days to the Victoria Falls. After two years of intrigue in the Tyrol and the Balkan States, and another of pursuing the pretty fire-flies of Vienna and Berlin, he had finally come back to Africa, to glut once more his wild, ancient Goth-lust for peril.

But he was still the same jovial sybarite, surrounded by a numerous and cringing *safari;* and he received us hospitably, putting at our disposal his big Cuxhaven-built steam-launch. We ran down the lake in her and trekked well provisioned for Nairobi, some three hundred and forty miles inland from Mombasa.

In the middle of January we arrived at Mombasa. There were the same three rounded peaks looming inland; the coral reef that divided Kilindini's opal tideway from the old harbor at English Point; the grim Portuguese-Arab fort, with its rusted, dismantled guns.

We had come back, miraculously saved, to the Land of Promise. With Norma I climbed into one of the yellow man-powered "gharry-cars" of the two-foot, toy street-railway and made straight for the Mombasa Club, where we looked up the Club time-tables for the first steamer sailing the Indian Ocean bound for Lorenzo Marquez.

CHAPTER XXVI

ENGLAND

DOWN the Indian Ocean we had steamed, day after day, to the east coast ports, and at Lorenzo Marquez we took the new Delagoa Railway to Johannesburg, where we were welcomed incredulously as those come back from the dead. At once we were laid siege to by an insistent flying squad of curious reporters from both the *Star* and *Diggers' News*, to whom Sherry dictated in his best barristerial manner a graphic tale of adventures and heroic hardships; but never a word about the lost and fallen city of Valkyria.

At a tall and exorbitant hotel in the great gold town we left our fellow travelers waiting while we went to make our peace with Raylescroft, who had given up his daughter for lost, as we had learned from mutual acquaintances—a piece of intelligence which brought a sudden mist of tears to Norma's eyes.

Then the Krugersdorp road at last, and the familiar big gray house on the hill. We rode up together through the silent avenue of trees, wondering why no Kaffirs came from the stables to care for our foaming horses. We were very quiet. Our thoughts were too full for speech. We had come back from the lost to tell old Raylescroft why Norma could never marry Lord Chalmes, and why she had brought back, instead of his debonair lordship, the fameless adventurer Alan Severn—and of the gold which Alan Severn had brought back; greater than all the gold that had built the House of Raylescroft.

But we found a silent, seemingly deserted house with its army of servants fled; gone as if from the plague, and in that house one old Boer housecarl who was too old and lame to run away. And then in silence he

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led us to the room that had been Raylescroft's library and showed us what was sitting there in a huge oaken chair, and why it sat so still. Then the old housecarl tiptoed through the door where the dust had settled thick across the massive lintel.

Norma gave one look at the dead man and swooned. It was her father. Raylescroft had been dead for hours.

As to me, I had more curiosity. After calling back the aged Boer, and with his assistance loosening the lace around her white throat, and chafing her cold, limp hands between us, until I saw the color coming back faintly into her pallid cheeks, I made Norma comfortable upon a couch.

Then I turned to look at what was in the dead man's hand, held fast in the clutch of his stiff, cramped fingers—a watermarked list of stocks in the Gold Exchange; which stocks I knew from of old were "wild-cat scrip" not worth altogether a Boer kroner; much less so many thousands of English pounds sterling as I could see jotted opposite each stock in that list of insecure "securities!"

By him on the dusty floor a yellowed paper arrested my eye. I picked it up; it was a mortgage memorandum upon the House of Raylescroft, giving the date of foreclosure—tomorrow. And then I knew what had killed Raylescroft . . . apoplexy.

He had speculated in the mushroom scrip of the Rand till he had lost every penny. He had been speculating, I knew, for years secretly, until he had sold himself in the body and ended by mortgaging his soul to the men who bought and sold the ever-changing scrip of the Rand gold mines. So many of them had gone the way of "Severn's Folly," until Cecil Rhodes had come with his strange offer of £5,000 down on the nail. I wondered what he had ever done to get back five thousand pounds; for men said that Cecil Rhodes had never made an investment which did not pay him well. But Rhodes was in England, I had learned.

So I understood at last why old Raylescroft had been so set upon having his daughter marry the rich young peer who had stayed behind in Valkyria . . . or what had once been Valkyria.

And then Norma opened her wide, startled eyes, with the strained, dazed look in them, like the eyes of a shot pheasant, and said—not, "Where am I?" as so many hurt young ladies say in books, but instead:

"Take me away, Alan. And please have some one close his eyes."

Silently I obeyed, for I knew she would come back to cry over the dead speculator who had been her father—when "some one" had straightened out that stark, huge dead old frame and contrived to close those very odd-looking, wide-open eyes, and made him look peaceful in his coffin. They would do all that, with the wonderful human patience and sympathy for which the care-takers of those who are beyond the reach of care so rarely get the credit they deserve in this worldly world; and have in truth no little trouble to collect their worldly debts.

So we buried the master of Raylescroft, in the appointed order of things; and bought back his mortgaged house—though we would never live in it—and sailed for England on one of the Southampton liners from the Cape, leaving in Africa only memories.

CHARING CROSS Station in the grimy heart of London, with its endless, sleepless streams of preoccupied, pallid faces; the Strand, with its tireless grind and roar of traffic, are not pleasant places to one who is better accustomed to the wild silence of the African veld. But leaving Norma to wait in one of the huge hotels across the Strand, which today replace the mean slums and haunts of Jacobean days, I found my way at last through Trafalgar Square and toward Piccadilly Circus to the rather dull lodgings of Cecil Rhodes in Jermyn Street. Rhodes' telegram in my pocket gave me his direction.

In the street I hesitated for half a minute, then pulled the brass knocker. There was no answer, and I rang again. A Cockney footman with a pair of purple silk calves that would have done credit to Covent Garden came out at last smoking a long, lean Russian cigarette very gingerly, as if it had been a new experience for him. He had a face precisely like a bleached Griqua.

"'Oo would your 'igh Mightiness hexpect to 'ave?" he queried blandly, with a satiric stare.

"Not your 'igh Insolence, my man," said I, and quietly kicked him clear of the curb.

He landed asprawl in the gutter, swallowing his Russian cigarette.

Without waiting to ascertain his subse-

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quent actions, I strode into the brilliantly lit hall, leaving the door ajar. Suddenly another door at the end of the lobby jerked open volcanically, and there across the threshold I perceived the strong, ruddy face and hard gray eyes of Cecil Rhodes.

"Well done, Captain Severn!" quoth Rhodes enthusiastically; taking in the whole scene at a glance. "He was an unappreciated present to me from Buckingham Palace. There—he has gone on strike, and I am rid of him. Come in and tell me your story. I have no doubt it is a remarkable one."

He listened for a long time imperturbably. I told him my extraordinary story. I told it all. Rhodes, because he knew Africa, and the men who have come out of its interior, believed. He knew that none of the queer tales that are told out of the "Dark Places of the Earth" could ever be one-half so strange as the unvarnished truth about Africa—if it were all known.

He knew that nobody could possibly invent or imagine or piece together such a tale as I told him. Outside in the darkening street brazen-lunged voices began to hawk extras of the London papers.

"The try-yul of Cessul Rhodes!"

Rhodes chuckled grimly.

"They've got me up before the Court of Inquiry, my boy," he said. "The Jamison Raid——"

I had read the *Morning Post*, and I knew about the official investigation, on the heels of that strange fiasco, the Jamison Raid. Rhodes had powerful friends in England; but not even a certain exalted Person at Windsor could wave away that Court of Inquiry.

"Public Sentiment" demanded it, the newspapers said. Whether it was manufactured sentiment or real, Rhodes did not inquire. It existed on paper—in print, at least. He had not been the prime mover in the Jamison Raid, which a few restless, hot-blooded "liberators" in the Transvaal had carried to its half-tragic, half-ridiculous conclusion in Oom Paul's back yard. He had known of it. He had not interfered with it, being a man big enough and broad enough to let liberty sow its wild oats without meddling.

So he was discredited now; on trial for an act he had not committed—tried by the Court of Inquiry which didn't really wish to inquire. He was Premier of Cape Colony no longer, and was reasonably cool under the collar for a man who had been put to so much ado about nothing. He explained all this to me briefly; he explained that even if there was nothing left in Valkyria to annex, he, Rhodes, had no power to annex it. He could still laugh, with his remarkable broken chuckle; he was going back to Africa.

"You have builded better than you dream," he said. "Buckingham Palace will want to make your acquaintance, Captain Severn. You've done England a great service; tamed a big problem—and the mailed hand behind it all shall never grip Africa again in its strangling fingers. That was the other Power—back of the scenes. Your Raoul de Roquemort would have cut off his right hand had he dreamed that he was lifting it for Germany."

Then Rhodes, in less words than would fill the half of one printed page in an ordinary school primer—told me of his big ideals for Africa. In three sentences he made prophecies the world of today finds written down as things realized and fulfilled, in some three hundred books. It was a wonderful thing to listen to the voices of Cecil Rhodes's people of the sun and water and wind. I knew that I had been listening to a Great Man.

The Court of Inquiry inquired, in a mild-mannered way, and Rhodes went back to help the grown children in the other land. But before he went back to Africa, having powerful friends and great influence with the highest in England, he had a private interview with Royalty. What passed he never told me; but it would not be hard to guess.

For the result was another private interview in which one Alan Severn, adventurer, went into Buckingham Palace and came out Sir Alan Severn, of Severn Hall, V. C.—by the grace of God and the empire-builder, Cecil Rhodes.

I never forgot the words of Victoria of England:

"Rise up, Sir Alan Severn," her clear, measured voice had said, "and teach your children what you have evidently found out for yourself with the aid of my good friend, Cecil Rhodes: that an Englishman's first duty is to the flag that Englishmen hold dear, and his second to the cause of humanity."

All that was my world of yesterday . . .

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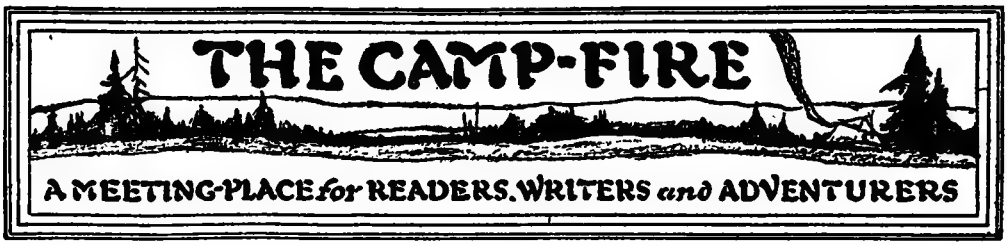
Lady Norma Severn reads, and smiles somewhat sadly. Today Cecil Rhodes lies dead and buried in the Matoppo Mountains; Sherry is playing barrister in the most elegant law-chambers in London; Raoul de Roquemort is drilling a French regiment of Algerian Horse; and Dr. Eric Ivarsson is at Oxford, writing the history of the lost Vikings of the Saga of Ull the Old. As for the rest, God knows where they are. Perhaps the siren-call of adventure is still pounding in their ears.

THE END



WHO was this man? No inquiries have been received at this office, but here is a letter from Byron M. Ehler which may lead to identification and solve a mystery for the dead man's friends and relatives:

I found these letters—K. V. K. X.—on the chest of an ex-cavalry lieutenant who was shot by Madero last January (1914). He went by the name of Bert Williams. He was fully 6 ft. 3 in. tall, light-brown hair, almost a sunburned black, and a .45 hole through both cheeks. Have you had any inquiries for such a man? If so, he is buried together with about fifty others in a trench two miles from Torreon, Mexico.

A WORD from Octavus Roy Cohen on his story last month, "Around the Bases":

I've actually seen the stunt described in the enclosed story. It's one of those battles of wits as well as baseball skill which go to make the game what it is—and John McGraw one of the greatest field-generals baseball has ever known.

The thing described in this story wouldn't get by twice—but then neither would Hanna's triple squeeze, yet his story made mighty interesting reading. And, as I say, I've seen this play made. It was in the Southern League the year before last.

LETTERS continue to come in supporting the idea of forming a Legion of adventurers for service in case of war but with no obligations in time of peace—a plan whereby seasoned and experienced men can have the opportunity to serve together and also get a better chance of being sent to the front more quickly than if they volunteered as separate individuals. Dr. J. E. Hausmann of this city is in charge of the preliminary work of temporary organization, and all communications should be addressed to him direct, though letters will be forwarded from this office. Dr. Hausmann's address will be kept standing in our Information Directory at the end of the "Camp-Fire."

Eager letters have been received from militia officers of various States expressing the desire to incorporate at least part of the Legion in their own particular organization. But that is not at all the idea of the Legion. Adventurers don't need to be told they can join the militia. The Legion is for those who can not or will not tie themselves to any fixed organization in peace times.

THE more you think about the Legion, the more advantages you will see in it. Joining it means practically nothing but sending in your name as one pledge to respond when war breaks out. In the meantime you remain free and foot-loose. When hostilities break out you will find yourself at a decided advantage over those who merely enlist as individuals. You have nothing to lose by the arrangement, and much to gain. If you're qualified, send your name in at once.

Here's a sample letter, making some suggestions. Bear in mind that what will be particularly needed in this country is cavalry, field artillery, engineers and sanitary complement.

It is a splendid idea and, as you mention, has been carried out both in Great Britain and her Colonies. I take the liberty of enclosing a form which is used by the Legion of Frontiersmen, as this organization is called, for your information; perhaps it may be of some help in arranging for the

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coming Legion. The British units in their departments vary according to the professional capabilities of their men, *i. e.*, one which has medical men and surveyors or C. E.'s among its company will have an engineering or surgeon's staff; others will have a flying corps if they are so fortunate as to have aviators in their unit, and so on. In time of war such a collection of adventurers, generally all good horsemen and rifle-shots, able to travel rapidly and live in the saddle, would prove of inestimable value to any War Department for scouting and flying cavalry purposes. I shall keep on the lookout and hope to hear more about this Legion. —E. CATON-KIRKHAM, O. S. C., Elroy, Wis.

I HAVE known W. Townend for several years, but by letter only, until he passed through New York a few months ago on his way back to England to see whether he couldn't get to the front in spite of the slightly defective eyesight on account of which he was refused for the English army some years ago.

Captain W. Robert Foran, as you know, has also gone to the front. His last letter reported him a captain in the Cambridgeshire Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. Theodore Goodridge Roberts is at this writing somewhere on the firing-line with the Canadian contingent. Captain George A. Schreiner is somewhere at the front as a war correspondent, Albert Kinross as a staff interpreter. I have reason to believe that quite a few others of our contributors are taking part in the European War, but I have had no definite word from them or concerning them.

IRELAND is a surprising country. Most of us have heard of the famous "Irish Brigade" who, exiled from Ireland, fled to France — the "Wild Geese" — and served their adopted country nobly during the eighteenth century. John Stagg's article in this issue will prove to many of us that we never realized the extent of that service. Nor do most of us know that the history of Spain, Germany, Austria, Italy, all Western Europe, in fact, shows many other Irishmen winning fame on the battlefield, often in exalted positions.

And yet these are the least of Ireland's forgotten achievements. Let me surprise you with some others. My authorities for the following are more often French, German and Italian scholars than Irish:

During the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries Ireland led all western Europe in learning. We consider Bologna, Paris and Oxford our oldest universities. When they were founded, in the twelfth century, Ireland had *already been having colleges for 600 years*—had taught Greek, Latin, geography (including the roundness of the earth), history, literature, grammar, astronomy, geometry, music, arithmetic, law, medicine, poetry. The degree of *ollave* in *Filidecht* (doctor of philosophy) was attained only by a carefully prescribed course of twelve years. Scholars flocked to Ireland from all over Europe, probably even from Egypt. King Dagobert II. of France was educated there in the seventh century. Also a king of Northumbria. A third of the city of Armagh was occupied by Saxon students.

FROM the sixth to the ninth century the Irish Church was foremost in Western Christendom. Irish saints and scholars went through all Europe as far as Bulgaria, converting and educating the heathen, founding schools and monasteries. Ill-fated Louvain and Gheel in Belgium; Luxeuil and Fontaines (in the Vosges), Peronne, Lagny, in France; Seckingen, Salzburg, Strasburg, Wurzburg, Nürnberg, Constanz, Regensburg (Ratisbon), in Germany; St. Gall in Switzerland; Iona in Scotland; Tarentum, Pavia, Bobbio, in Italy; Vienna, Eichstädt in Austria—these are a few of the places where educated Irishmen left their mark as founders or teachers from the sixth to the twelfth century.

There is no extant example of writing in any Germanic language, except the Gothic, that dates before 800. A hundred years earlier Ireland had produced the "Book of Kells," now in Dublin, acknowledged the most beautiful illuminated manuscript in the world. Their work of nearly 1,000 years ago in gold, silver, bronze and enamel is exquisite even by the standards of today.

EXISTING old Irish books of saga, poetry and annals are far more ancient and numerous than those of any other Western European nation, possibly barring Italy. In the eleventh century Irish poetry had reached higher perfection than that of any other vernacular language in Western Europe. Their rhyming system reached a perfection undreamed of, even to-day, by other nations. It seems fairly well established that Ireland taught Europe to rhyme. Gaelic is the oldest and most cultured vernacular in all Europe, except Greek alone.

The Irish have had 1,500 years of culture, and most of us are inclined to think of them as barbarians up to a few centuries ago!

IN "LOST Trails" appears an item asking for "Struthers." It came in to us with the following letter, and we're glad to be of service. But it occurs to me that it would be far simpler and quicker for two men to agree, if they lose each other, that each shall write to the other in care of this magazine, and *also* to me, asking me to forward any mail for them to an address givn.

The letter comes from a country in Central America:

I have lost my partner somewhere in Mexico. We have been readers of *Adventure* for years, and some months ago agreed if we got separated to use it as a finder. If you will be so good as to insert the following he will be sure to see it.

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WHEN I asked you to "help edit *Adventure*" and put a page ballot in the January issue covering some fifty points on which we wanted your opinions and advice naturally we expected some valuable results and useful information. But we didn't expect to get as much as we did get. It's all right to have theories as to what your readers like and dislike but it's three times more worth while to *know* what they like.

We asked you to help us and you certainly did. But, quite aside from the practical aid you gave, I—and all of us—was deeply gratified and pleased over the tremendous expression of downright personal friendship that breathed from the letters accompanying your votes and from the votes themselves with their answers and side remarks. A little of it wouldn't have been surprising in the case of any magazine, but the number and sincerity of the friendly words that came in to *Adventure* make it plain beyond any doubt that for once a magazine has been lucky enough to attain a human, real, personal, informal relationship with its readers and can count them as part of itself instead of impersonal and unknown people who can be induced to buy copies of it.

I'M NOT talking about mere slush and "jolly." The readers of *Adventure* are not the type to hand out much slush and jolly. Some of the things that made me most sure of the writers' friendship were combined with adverse criticism on this point or on that. But when you "cussed us out" about anything it was unmistakably a friend who did it and did it to help.

Another fine thing was the consideration shown for the "other fellow's" opinions—"I don't like this myself but I guess a lot of other people do."

When the votes began coming in I tried to reply personally to the many personal letters that accompanied them. Too many, I had to give it up. Take the will for the deed. Let me thank you now. I won't run into language over it, but my thanks are real.

AT THIS writing the votes are still coming in and being carefully tabulated. Not only the replies to the questions asked but also every favorable or unfavorable criticism added to them or in the accompanying letters. We're going to get all we can from them. From returns already in, it looks as if *Adventure* would, on most points, remain about as it is, but on certain others the majority is piling up for change. When we know just what you want we'll try to give it to you. Remember, however, that a magazine is made up some time ahead and changes will not come all at once. But we *know* now that it *is* your magazine as well as ours and when we say you are to help edit it we mean it.

KEEP up the good work of voting, even when no special ballots are prepared. The time to tell us what you do and do not like is any old time. The monthly table of contents sent back with a "yes" or "no" after each item is a big help. Get the habit.

WHEN you have read the following letter I want to make a suggestion.

My purpose in writing was because I am an invalid. My trouble is due to years of banging around in the lumber business in the South and West Indies where I contracted fevers and now I am paying the fiddler by imprisonment in a sick-room off and on with no more chance to roam as I used. It occurred to me that as a former fellow traveler over the ground of numberless readers of *Adventure* who is now passé, are there not many of the readers who would be glad to drop just a card on their travels or where they may be, just to lighten the load of a former cronie? My only link with active life is my reading, but your "Information Department" led me to realize how many readers are roaming around as I did and that you possibly might get some of them to write me their travels by putting a little squib in the "Directory" to that effect although far out of the line it is made for.

Anyway wishing you success, I am,

GEORGE H. HICKS,
3 Mt. Pleasant St., St. Johnsbury, Vt.

I know personally of others of you tied down by illness or affairs who have made similar requests. I know, too, of adventurers on the open road who feel a bit lonesome now and then and have a hankering for some one to keep in touch with. I'm not drawing on my imagination. The Camp-Fire isn't the place for that. I'm talking about actual specific instances.

I SUGGEST this. Let whoever of you feels the need of a "letter friend" send us his name and address and we'll publish it in the magazine as far as space permits. No room for letters. No responsibility on our part. Some of the letters you get may be undesirable. That's your lookout, not ours. We merely publish your name and address at your request and you handle the

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rest of it as you see fit. All darn fools are requested to keep out; the plan is a sincere one for the furtherance of good-fellowship, friendship and the banishment of that lonely feeling that comes to the strongest as well as the bed-ridden. Women's names will not be published. We may divide the list into stay-at-homes who want to hear from rovers, rovers who want to hear from stay-at-homes, and a special group of the crippled or invalids; don't know yet. We'll do the best we can and you must allow us to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to the plan.

Don't consider your own interests alone; think of the other chap and what help you can be to him. Keep the question of money clear out of your correspondence. There are better things in the world than money. Most of us like to be decent sometimes. Here's a chance.

SEVERAL months ago we printed a story which brought from our readers the complaint that it was too largely a rehash of other stories by the same author published in another magazine. I can say only that, if we had known of the resemblance or duplications complained of, they would not have appeared. As you know, it is not our custom to publish anything that has previously been presented to our American and Canadian audience.

It is only just to the writer of the story in question to tell you that when the matter was put up to him he replied that he considered himself fully justified in the course he had followed. We believe in his sincerity but disagree with him.

AFTER many efforts to work out satisfactorily the problem of getting our identification-cards into the form of aluminum tags or buckles we shall have to turn to some other material if they are to be issued in more durable shape. In aluminum the tags would cost three or four dollars if made right and this seems to us too much to ask, though some of you, of course, would gladly pay even more than that. Perhaps we can coat the cards with celluloid and possibly provide a leather open-face case at cost. Meanwhile the demand for the cards in their present form continues as strong as ever. If you haven't one, give us the two names and addresses, enclose a stamped envelope and—"she's yours."

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

J. ALLAN DUNN is our old Allan Dunn. Had to add the "J" because there's another Allan Dunn who writes. Here are some of our man's adventures hastily jotted down for the Camp-Fire. His novel opens this issue.

Had some rather exciting times in Leadville, Colo., during the miners' strike. I quartered with Chaffee Light Artillery. Used to escort new troops and "scabs" from depot. Under orders not to retaliate, used to stand while being rocked by miners with missiles from convenient dumps. Averaged two alarms a night of mines being blown up. This meant gatlings plunging at midnight over snow-filled gulches and ridges with miners taking snipe-shots at us with Winchesters.

Saw Soapy Smith and One-Eyed Baker—afterward killed on the wharf in Alaska—run out of Creede mining-camp.

IN VICTOR, Colo., one night, foolishly took in the camp with stranger. He turned out to be one of the deputies with General Tarsney of the Militia, who was tarred and feathered by the miners. The deputy was recognized in a dance-hall by a girl. We were hailed as spies and were quite unpopular. One of the first shots that started put out the lights. I found the door just after my friend. The Sheriff came and restored order with the butt-end of his gun. My deputy was shot in the shoulder and I got the ends of my fingers slashed in the dark.

Saw the Sheriff at Cripple Creek stand off with two guns a crowd of angry miners who believed he had arrested the wrong man for a murder. He walked through the crowd of them to the big flagpole in the center of town, backed up to it and cussed them to a finish. Afterward they found he had got the right man. But only his nerve saved him that afternoon.

SAME town, one night, three of us had been lucky at faro. Bunked in a cabin. Some one opened the door about three o'clock, and Little, a cow-puncher friend of mine, flipped a knife at the intruder. He yipped and they dug out, taking the knife as souvenir.

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Saw a bad-man, hold-up, murderer—lynched in Denver. They drove him under the stringers of the bridge through the shallow water in a wagon. The rope was bungled and he finally tied it himself. An Italian was also hanged to a lamp-post for looting a bread-wagon. These during the panic.

At Canyon City, Colo., trailed with a posse after a convict who had made an escape and made for the cliff-tops of the Royal Gorge. There was no water there and they waited for him to come down to the river. Second night he came down. The guards ordered him to throw up his hands and he dodged behind a rock. One of the volunteer posse killed him with a Sharp's. He had, it seemed, wronged this man's wife.

PEAK-HALYARDS broke on us off Rabbit Island Reef one sunset—coast of Oahu, Hawaii—and we had a close call from water and sharks. Was badly coral-bumped; had running sores for weeks from live coral.

Had a very close call from a man-eating shark at entrance of Pearl Harbor. Was in swimming with Prince Cupid—Jonah Kalanianaole, Delegate to Congress—when his secretary, Morris, yelled at us. Believe I broke the hundred-yard record. The channel drops into thirty fathoms suddenly and the shark quit in shallow water. We watched him slowly glide away, dorsal fin and lobe of tail-fin out of water. A good eighteen feet.

Went to top of Mauna Loa, Hawaii, during eruptain. Extra shoes burned off us and we had to run over blistering rocks to escape sudden gush of lava.

Got mobbed while dove-shooting at Waialua, Oahu, by Japanese cane-hands. We stood them off in a cane-clump till dark. Lost a fine bunch of rice-fed doves.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care Explorers' Club, 345 Amsterdam Ave., New York City. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Ag., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal North West Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

Mail Address:—This office will hold or forward legitimate mail for our readers free of charge but assuming no responsibility.

For the Legion. Dr. J. E. Hausmann, 709 W. 169th St., New York City, or this magazine.

CAN you add any reliable sources of adventure information to our Information Directory above? Read carefully the note marked "important."

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

MEN who are good shots, not afraid of roughing it and are in a position to stay away for some time with me to hunt polar bear, walrus, and seal in Baffin Bay. Also mineral prospecting chances. Sure adventure, probable profit. Adventurer spent seven months there; reached 77° N. Lat. Knows of big copper ledge and many good hunting fields.—Address SANDON PERKINS, F. R. G. S., Post Office, Toronto, Canada.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER to make a bicycle trip with me from Tacoma, Wash., to Great Falls, Montana, from there to go down Mississippi River in boat to New Orleans. Object to have a good time and see the country. I am 21 years, American, and would like to hear from some one near my own age in Wash., Ore., or Cal. Also want information as to best bicycle route.—Address G. E. COLLINS, 1116½ So. C Street, Tacoma, Wash.

PARTNER ready to rough it and work his way to Coast, via Southern route. One interested in prospecting and possibly going on to Alaska.—Address W. H. BOY, R. F. D. No. 1, Box 70, Sewickley, Pa.

MEN who can ride and shoot to enlist in a Volunteer Regiment of Cavalry organized in San Antonio, Texas. The McNeel Scouts are made up from cowboys, men along the border and discharged soldiers from U. S. Army. You will not be required to join the regiment here until it is actually ordered into field. Then you will be notified. The regiment is about filled up but there are a few vacancies for right men.—Address CAPT. WALTER ACKER, JR., McNeel's Scouts, San Antonio, Texas.

ONE or two young men between 25-35 years old to go on prospecting trip to Alaska or South America. Prefer Alaska or Northern Canada. We could also hunt and trap. Only honest, red blooded young men that like adventure need apply. Would rather have those with experience.—Address R. DAVID POLAND, 602 St. Clair Street, Chicago, Ill.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER. Willing to go anywhere you can get adventure or profit. Have no previous experience in roughing it and have no money.—Address J. F. VISGENE, Neil House, Columbus, Ohio.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

HARRY FLOYD, father, old-time stage-driver in Idaho. Afterward in employ Pacific Coast Mail Steamers as Supt. mail department. Last heard of 'Frisco 1893, en route to Sydney, Australia. Sixty-five years old; 5 ft. 10 in. tall; light hair and complexion.—Address HARRY FLOYD, Clarkston, Wash., care General Delivery.

JULIUS C. DIGEL (Jack), left home, Castile, N. Y., for Oklahoma oil fields 1912. Wrote last from Crosby, N. D., 1912. Born 1888; weight 163 lbs.; height about 5 ft. 10 in.; dark hair; gray eyes. Right hand injured. Probably in Canada or Montana.—Address CARL F. DIGEL, Cridersville, Ohio.

CHARLES GREENWOOD, formerly of England. Trapped in region north of Whitefish Lake with Dave Hoover Winter of 1888. Last heard of Lake Chelan, Wash.—Address E. F. C., 528 E. Front St., Missoula, Mont.

HARRY GROWMAN, refugee from Mexico, Vera Cruz, last heard Juarez on way to Chihuahua. May have returned to Vera Cruz.—Address C. E. S., 1220 2nd St., San Diego, Cal.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

JIM VANDERDASSON. One of West's white men. Partner in woods, Payette and Snake Rivers, Idaho. Afterward learned ranching, Rogue River, Oregon.—Address SANDON PERKINS, F. R. G. S., Post-Office, Toronto, Canada.

J. F. LUECKE, telegrapher, last heard from at Livingston and Belgrade, Mont., with Northern Pacific Railway.—Address E. O. PREY, Tropical Radio Telegraph Co., New Orleans, La.

HARRY F. REED, railroad clerk and car-inspector, formerly with S. P. de Mex. at Empalme, Mexico. Last heard of El Reno, Okla., 1912, going west. Also any one who was with me in USSC Alaska, in 1904-06.—Address E. D. PREY, Tropical Radio Telegraph Co., New Orleans, Louisiana.

COMRADES who served in 34th Inf., Co. B, in Philippines 1899-1901.—Address ELMER PAGNETTE, Box 205, Santa Ana, Cal.

JOSE L. PERALTO, Mexico, Y. M. C. A. athlete. Last seen New Orleans, La.—Address AL DE COSTE, 521 Columbus Ave., Boston, Mass.

FORREST BENNETT WHITTAKER, of E. Braintree, Mass. Last heard from Cristobal, Canal Zone.—Address AL DE COSTE, 521 Columbus Ave., Boston, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WILLIAM J. MASON. Left Trenton, N. J., 1892 for Hoosick Falls, N. Y. No word since.—Address JOHN HUFFMAN, Glen Una, Los Gatos, Cal.

GEORGE F. KENNEDY, last seen Marcus, Wash. Probably in Wash. or Br. Col.—Address M. KENNEDY, Box 422, Oceanside, Cal.

ADRIAN ENGLEHART, attended the public schools Louisville, Kentucky, 1905.—Address ARTHUR COOK, 1604 E. Harrison St., Seattle, Wash.

A. J. Love from home. Please send just a word. "Little Feller" prays for you every night.—MOTHER AND ADELE, L. T. 264.

COL. JOHN (JACK) STANLEY RADCLIFFE. At Tia Juana with P. M. and L., 1911. Mexico again if you will go.—Address P., care U. S. Grant Hotel, San Diego, Cal.

CLARENCE COPPINGER, last heard of 1911 Oleum, Cal., working for Union Oil Co. Father and mother dead. Small inheritance awaiting him.—Address CHARLES COPPINGER, Postmaster, Hanover, Ont., Canada.

P. A. STOKES, in Honolulu, Hilo, 1911, and Walter Daley, Tampico, Mex., 1912.—Address G. G. GORDON Co. D, 20th Batt., Mobilization Camp, Toronto, Ont., Canada.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BEN LUSCUMB, my bunkie Hospital Corps Columbus Barracks, Ohio, 1906-07-08. Last heard of Philippines.—Address GEO. G. VAN FLEET, Elm Park, Edmonton, Canada.

McCORMACK. With him 1912-13 on construction work, Mexico, Necaxa district on Laxaxalpam tunnels.—Address CHESTER F. KIRSCHNER, Cinco Minas Co., Magdalena, Jalisco, Mexico.

CHARLES HIYDEN, worked Gas City, Ind., in '94-95. Last address, Pawnee, Ill., Spring of '95.—Address ROBERT TWADDLE, 715 Green St., Greensbury, Pa.

ROBERT ALLEN, 5 ft. 6 in.; medium build; weight 150 lbs.; black hair, brown eyes. Lived until 1909 at Bucyrus, Ohio. Barber in Aberdeen, S. D. Left him San Francisco 1910. No word since.—Address F. E. DENINGER, Box C, Fulton, Mo.

KARL H. HECKENHAUER, of Muncie, Ind. Formerly yeoman on U. S. S. *Kansas.* Discharged 1913.—Address U. S. S. *Florida*, care Postmaster, New York.

JOSEPH ANTHONY ARMBRUSTER, brother, born Buffalo, N. Y., Oct. 29, 1892. 5 ft. 2 in.; 140 lbs.; blue eyes, blond hair. Last heard from Ogden, Utah, Nov. 8, 1911.—Address JOHN L. ARMBRUSTER, 445 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

A. W. BEATON, once of Quincy, Ill. Winner of three-mile handicap at Alexandra Palace in 1880. Last heard from California, twelve years ago.—Address L. B. LUSK, Quincy, Ill.

JIMMY BREW, JESS HOWARD, LITTLE MACK AND GEORGE PADGETT, who were in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1907.—Address H. MONEYSMITH, 603 A Street. N. W., Ardmore, Okla.

GROVER C. SYKES, last heard of Honaker, Va. Please write to G. C. C., care Z. P., Ancon, C. Z.

"STRUTHERS." Jack and Jim got out. On way to Balboa. Will follow. Wire, write, or come.—Address MAC, care *Adventure.*

W. J. (BILL) STEWART. Write me if you want to join me on trip far south in the Spring.—Address GEORGE, care *Adventure.*

WILLIAM REYNOLDS, stationed at Tucuran some time during 1902-04 as a sergeant. (F. Co. 23rd Infantry.)—Address L. T. 216.

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DONALD NORTH, once chief steward on Leyland lines, *Cestrian*, *Winifredian* and a Red Star, Antwerp boat. Traveled London with him several times. Last heard of 1904.—Address CHARLES OMAR ROGERS, 875 Washington St., Boston, Mass.

JAMES DAVENPORT, last seen New Orleans, La., March 1912. Native of Mississippi. Age 29; height about 5 ft. 10 in.; light hair, blue eyes. Two years with Pennsylvania Mounted Police.—Address C. BERDINE WALKER, 331 Seeley Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

BOYD, descendants of Captain William Boyd, an American officer in English force that captured Louisburg from the French about 1750. Last heard of as settled near Wiscassett, Maine.—Address, A. BOYD, care *Adventure*.

FRED MATTHEWS, movie operator and feather-weight boxer, formerly of Helena, Mont. Last heard from Ogden, Utah, wanted join me on cycle trip Northampton, Mass., last July.—Address E. J. MILLER, Marion Ave., Plantsville, Conn.

OGDEN, known as "Tex" or "Two Bar Slim," cowpuncher, miner, radio operator, sailor, soldier of fortune. Last heard of Culican, Cananea, Mexico.—Address JACK WOLFF, Rawhide, Nevada.

S. A. GOLDSTEIN, JR., brother. Inheritance awaiting him. Age 23, 5 ft. 10 in., stooped shoulders. Last heard of Syracuse, New York.—Address NATHAN GOLDSTEIN, Box 40, Yonkers, New York.

LEON D. SCISCO, last heard of U. S. Training Ship *Newport* in New York City, 1912, worked also in Lead, S. D.—Address M. JAMES GOLDSTEIN, 50 Maple Street, Yonkers, N. Y.

THE following have been inquired for in the February and March issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

BROWN, EDWARD G.; Bradford, Wm. Frank; Carhart, Joseph; Cook, Wm, 14th Cav.; Dowst, Arthur A.; Fellows, Frank E.; Fields, Harry R.; Jenkins, Earl; Kernohan, Frank; Lewis, Harrison H.; Lindsay, Charles; Loeber, Charles; McClellan, William; McFall, Joseph; McKeever, Arthur; Marsh, Memer; Mc-Kenney, Hugh; Manzey, Jack; Meade, Dan; Mendoza, Richarde: Nylander, C. W.; Pettit, James R.; Reeves, Paul V.; Rhode, Gust; Sherwood, Dote (Golden); Snead, Jack; Snider, M. E.; Spiering, August Frederick Wm.; Stocton, Walter; Sutton, Edw. H.; Turner, Charles N.; Turnnard, Frank A.; Walker, Charles T.; Young, Dale L.

MISCELLANEOUS—Mrs. Wm. Ross, orphan inquiring about herself; Don; Reckless where are you; Shipmates on Hamburg-American line, tramp, *Sornia*, New York to Frontera, Mexico, June 2nd to 21st 1913.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 107, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 218, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 198, C 205, L. T. 207. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pacheca, Mexico; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; Charles E. Mack, New York; William Barry Kane, Chocolate Bayou, Texas; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.; A. P. Price, Ashton, Birmingham, England.

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, please send us your present address. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

AS ANNOUNCED in the July issue, every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

For the benefit of those of our readers who like to know in advance what stories are coming to them in the next ADVENTURE, we set aside this space. The following are at present booked for the May issue, out April 3d:

THE BOSS' DAUGHTER — *By William West*

Complete Novel. A strong tale of auto making and racing.

CHARLIE BROWN OF LAMBETH — *By W. Townend*

Complete Novelette. A story that takes hold.

THE AZOIC LAW — *By Samuel Alexander White*

A tale of Dawson Days, and Sark and Bassett.

THE MAN FROM HOME — *By Gordon McCreagh*

India; a man who knows the jungle; an adventure.

A TEMPORARY TRADE IN TITLES — *By Talbot Mundy*

A Western sheriff visits an English lord and things happen.

THE MAN-TRAIL — *By Henry Oyen*

The second part of one of the best stories we ever published.

A QUESTION OF BRAINS — *By E. A. Morphy*

A fight that *is* a fight.

THE REWARD — *By J. Allan Dunn*

The first of a series of tales about Sandy Bourke, cowboy.

FLOWER OF THE BATTLE — *By Joseph Mills Hanson*

The romance of an Indian fight on the old frontier.

A MODERN FLYING DUTCHMAN — *By Wilbur Daniel Steele*

A sea-story of an unusual kind.

UNDER FALSE COLORS — *By Rudolph R. Krebs*

Having to do with a robbery and a surprise.

SOLDIERS OF STEEL — *By Hapsburg Liebe*

A story of American soldiers in the Philippines.

And Others! And Others! And Others!

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Adventure
Wants Representatives

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OWEN JOHNSON

BY JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG

Everybody's Magazine

for

MARCH

OWEN JOHNSON

(Author of "The Salamander," "Stover at Yale," etc.)

begins his sensational new novel, "Making Money," in the March *Everybody's*. It is by all odds the biggest thing this brilliant young American has done. He gives us an inside view of how money is made in New York and the effect it has on the careers of four young Yale graduates. "Making Money" is an absorbing romance.

HENRY REUTERDAHL

the greatest marine artist in America, has just returned from Europe with some wonderful paintings that make you *know* what sea-fighting means. They are brilliant and terrible. They illustrate his own absorbing article

ZEPPELIN—*King of the Air*

Did you know that Count Zeppelin has lived in America? Do you know where he got the idea for his stupendous air-craft? T. R. MacMechen, our leading aerial authority, has written the marvelous story of Zeppelin's life, containing facts made public for the first time.

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